LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT

MARIE COOLIDGE-RASK

DO YOU WANT ANOTH
GOOD STORY? LOOK ON
OTHER SIDE OF THIS WRAPP
FOR A LIST OF MORE THAN
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LONDON AFTER MIDNI

By MARIE COOLIDGE-RA

"A criminal, when hy
tized under proper cond
will re-enact his crime.

On this theory
Chief Detective Inspe
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Balfour House there is a
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the trail of the midnigh
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their part in tracking d
the murderer—and when
crime is re-enacted B
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LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *London After Midnight.*

THE MAN IN THE BEAVER HAT (LON CHANEY) FRIGHTENS MISS SMITHSON.

LONDON
AFTER MIDNIGHT

BY

MARIE COOLIDGE-RASK

BASED ON THE SCENARIO
OF THE
TOD BROWNING PRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY
A METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PICTURE
STARRING LON CHANEY

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LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT

CHAPTER ONE

BALFOUR HOUSE

"SHADOWED BY TRAGEDY"

MANY generations of Balfours had lived, married and died in Balfour House. Its foundations were laid long before the time of Charles II. One after another of its owners had, at various times, sought to develop, enlarge, simplify or otherwise alter its original plan, according to their varying finances and individual ideas.

The result was an architectural abnormality as weird and mystifying as the stories of misfortune connected with the Balfour family. These current tales suggested a strange fatality, from which each successive generation seemed powerless to escape.

At the time little Lucy Balfour and her brother Harry were removed from the gloomy habitation of their early childhood to the more

cheerful atmosphere of Hamlin House their father, Roger Balfour, a quiet, studious man, had just been found dead, an empty revolver near his outstretched hand, a bullet wound in his temple.

Financial trouble and melancholia were acknowledged causes for the rash act, and every effort was made by the dead man's friend and neighbor, Sir James Hamlin, to blot its memory from the minds of the two children and to settle the estate quietly and without delay.

So successfully was this accomplished that Balfour House, long associated with tragedy, soon became shunned and isolated. The once familiar figure of Roger Balfour, wrapped in a long, black cloak, no longer traversed the rambling walks that threaded the neglected gardens. The sound of his weary, pacing footsteps echoed no more from the sonorous flags that flanked the lonely terrace. For the tall, gaunt, kindly gentleman who for years had mourned the loss of the fair-haired young mother of his children lay beside her in the dark recesses of the mausoleum where rested the bones of his ancestors.

With scrupulous regard for detail Sir James saw to it that every known wish of his deceased friend was complied with. No will was found and, when the estate was settled, no funds remained for the maintenance of the two children nor for the upkeep of the old house and extensive, unprofitable grounds of which young Harry Balfour was now the owner.

The magnanimous generosity of the elderly bachelor, Sir James Hamlin, won for him unstinted praise. He opened his doors to the orphaned children and announced himself their guardian. Balfour House, he declared, would remain closed unless a tenant appeared who would accept it unconditionally, without promise of repairs.

He refused to consider a sale of the property, announcing that he would personally supervise and finance the education of the two children and find for Harry, when the latter became of age, a bride whose income would be sufficient to rehabilitate the estate he had inherited.

Sir James kept his word. Lucy, who was thirteen at the time of her father's death, developed into a charming and cultured young woman. Harry, less than two years her senior, she idolized and looked after with almost maternal solicitude.

The two were companionable though Harry, like his father, was quiet and given to fits of brooding. On such occasions he was apt to revert to circumstances ante-dating their father's death and speculate upon the singular generosity of their benefactor.

For Harry possessed a vague and inexplicable antipathy toward Sir James which, as the years passed, did not lessen. The baronet, for his part, manifested an almost paternal interest in the young man and there were those who thought he would one day make Harry his

heir. Connected, the two great estates would have an enormous value, and the Hamlin wealth was undoubtedly ample for their upkeep.

But Balfour House was now falling into a serious state of decay. Its windows were broken. Shutters, where there were any, were loose and flapping. The desolate terrace fronted on a broad lawn, dark with forest trees, at the side sloping away to the gardens where, for years, never a flower had grown. There were crumbling stone walls and overgrown arbors, their rotted wood frames falling apart, and fragments of broken statuary looming here and there like spectral figures from another world.

Within the house, conditions were little better. Throughout the dreary, rambling structure there ran a labyrinth of halls, unexpected corridors and narrow passage-ways. From these flowed an endless succession of odd, dark rooms, winding stairs and obscure, shadowy retreats set in out-of-the-way corners as if to offer sanctuary to some harassed inmate, fleeing from an advancing foe.

Most of the rooms were dark and massively furnished, with deep, mysterious recesses and heavy curtains. From the west windows one could look away for miles over the surrounding country. To the east one saw the ruined gardens, then a grove and, at its left, the hill where slept, in their gloomy sepulchre, those men and women whose voices and footsteps

had once resounded through the confines of this eerie dwelling.

There was one room more dismal, more forbidding than any of the others. It had four long slits of windows like frowns and four narrow doors between which were cupboards sunk in the walls, some with doors that would not open, others with doors that would not shut. At the end of the room were four broad steps. Mounting these one came to a door strongly secured by bolts and padlocks. The bolts were firm and the keys to the padlocks had been lost. Many years had passed since the last curious person had crossed that threshold to investigate the room that lay beyond.

It was a secret chamber in which, it was said, a beautiful young woman had met a horrible death. Always, on the eve of an impending tragedy, her unhappy spirit returned to the scene of her suffering, there to walk restlessly to and fro, sobbing and moaning through the darkest hours of the night. The last time anyone claimed to have heard the ghostly footsteps with their accompaniment of sobs was the night Roger Balfour died.

From the lawn without, it was possible, if one knew which tree to climb, to glimpse the interior of this secret place of imprisonment, so reeking with tragedy and supernatural manifestations. The room was large and irregular, and it was reached by means of a narrow, circular stairway ascending from the padlocked door below.

In the east wing of this dilapidated, abandoned mansion was the picture gallery. It was wainscotted and gloomy, like all the rest of the house. Long rows of dead and gone Balfours looked down from the carved walls. There were knights in armor, ladies in ruffles and lace, bishops with mitre and crozier, judges in gown and wig. And among the imposing array was a life size painting of that unfortunate young woman who had lost her life in that mysterious, secret chamber.

She was dark-haired, dark-eyed, with an oval face of extreme pallor, and there was that in her attitude strongly suggestive of flight and unrest, as if she found her companions uncongenial and longed for escape. But she was haughty and beautiful, and arrayed in sweeping, dark draperies not of the period but designed apparently by the artist to set off the graceful, svelt form and enhance the mystic beauty of those fathomless dark eyes.

The tall windows of the gallery opened to the level of the ground upon the terrace at the head of the garden, but they were closed and boarded up where they had been broken open.

The library, in the west wing, also had such windows. It was a square room at the left of the main entrance hall which ran from north to south, completely dividing the structure. Directly over this wing was a great clock tower from which, in days past, the hours rang dismally enough during the day but tolled like a knell in the dead of night.

For years the clock had been silent. Bats now congregated in the tower and birds of ill omen perched on its ledges, while clustering ivy almost obscured the face of the timepiece that had once looked placidly out over the countryside from those old, gray walls that had fought the elements for so many centuries.

Such was Balfour House on the outskirts of London when young Harry Balfour came home from school and announced to his guardian, Sir James Hamlin, that he wished the place reopened.

This, Sir James declared, was impossible. Such an act would involve too great a cost, he argued and, to Harry's surprise and consternation, he submitted figures covering the amount which the baronet had already expended upon the education and maintenance of himself and his sister, Lucy.

Item by item Harry went over the list, the frown deepening between his brows as he did so. When he finished he replaced the papers on Sir James' desk, before which the baronet was sitting, and stood facing him.

"I will repay every penny of it, sir," he said.

"How?" queried Sir James benignly, a quizzical smile playing at the corners of his mouth, as if he were humoring the unreasonable tantrum of a child.

"I don't know how," returned the young man with evident perplexity, adding after a brief pause, "but I will never be content until

I have repaid all of the amount for which you claim I am now in your debt."

"Tut, tut, lad!" exclaimed Sir James soothingly. "I do not make any claim against you. I merely wanted to convince you that I could not afford any further outlay at the present time. What I have done has been done gladly —for your dear father's sake," he added in a tone almost reverently reminiscent. "I, as well as you, would like to see Balfour House restored and the estate improved; but we will have to wait, I fear, for a wealthy tenant—or until you have found a wealthy bride."

Young Balfour resented the words. A dull, angry flush glowed through the usual pallor of his dark face. His sombrous eyes flashed.

"I will never marry upon such conditions," he retorted, hotly. "I do not choose to sue for a lady's hand in the rôle of a beggar. I propose to live in my father's house and to earn money in some way to wipe out my obligation to you, sir."

Again the baronet protested, his soft, cultured accents falling with the smoothness of oil upon troubled waters.

"I assure you, Harry, I do not look upon it as an obligation. But here is a proposition; if it will make you happier of mind I am quite willing to place the matter upon a business basis. You are of age now and can mortgage the estate to me for a sum somewhat in excess of this amount already advanced. That will place you upon the more independent footing

you desire. You will have a little capital on hand to go to America, or Australia and, in time, if you are successful, you can redeem the mortgage."

"And if I am not successful—"

The tone in which Harry uttered the words was ominous. He paused with the sentence unfinished.

The baronet was unperturbed.

"I would foreclose," he said calmly, "then deed the property over to your sister, Lucy."

"The devil you would! She would not accept it."

"I think she would, Harry. I think she would."

Sir James' confidence in Lucy's willingness to accept such a gift only angered Harry the more. His next words were an open defiance.

"I disagree with you, sir. And if you think I would assent to the proposition you have just made, Sir James, you have formed a wrong estimate of my character. I am not forgetful of the fact that I am a Balfour. I propose to live in Balfour House, come what may. I was born there. I shall die there. I will not mortgage away my birthright. I am not unappreciative of all that you have done for my sister and myself when we were too young to do for ourselves. But now, I am the head of our family. Balfour House must be my home. Lucy must come with me."

It was not the first time the Balfour will had pitted itself against the equally inflexible will

of a Hamlin. For years Sir James had found it difficult to control Harry. Lucy had always been tractable; Harry, never. The baronet made one more effort.

"Suppose I buy the property, outright, Harry," he suggested in his most fatherly manner. "Of course, in its present condition, it is not a good investment but I might pay you a fair sum, less the amount you insist you owe me, and later, as I said before, I will give and bequeath it to your sister."

Harry's dark eyes, so like those of his mysterious relative who haunted the secret chamber at Balfour House, looked fiercely into the pale blue orbs of his benefactor as if to read his soul.

"So?" he queried mockingly. "And—in the meantime—"

"Lucy will continue to live with me at Hamlin House," said Sir James, finishing the sentence for him. "She is very happy there; I will see that she continues to be happy."

For a moment the young man remained silent. It was his nature to consider problems from all angles. Now he weighed the proposition before him calmly, sternly, relentlessly. Once his decision was made it would be unalterable. Knowing this, Sir James sat in equal silence and waited. At length the answer came.

"No." The monosyllable was low spoken, but clear and decisive. The speaker looked not unlike a young crusader, standing tall and

slender, the light of high resolve and noble purpose illumining his delicate features. He had made his choice and was ready to face whatever fate had in store for him.

"It would be treason," he continued. "The betrayal of a trust. I owe it to my sister, to my father and to myself as his successor to do what I can to uphold the family name, its honor and its house. It shall not be said of me that I failed. So long as I live the Balfour estate shall not revert to other hands." He dropped wearily into a chair. There was nothing more to be said.

The baronet seemed scarcely to have heard. Sir James was still sitting in the same tranquil posture he had maintained throughout the interview, but whereas he had previously looked steadfastly into Harry's face, he now gazed off into space, his pale eyes expressionless, his countenance a mask for any emotion he may have felt. For a moment there was silence. Then the older man spoke.

"This decision of yours is final?"

"Final."

Another brief interval of silence, then Harry pulled himself to his feet and, with his head bowed in thought, crossed the room to the hall which lay beyond and slowly ascended the stairs.

Nearing the door of his suite he encountered a ruddy-faced, bespectacled young man about his own age. It was Jerry Hibbs, Sir James Hamlin's secretary, an excitable, pedagogical

individual for whom Harry had small liking. They seldom conversed together, but now, at sight of the secretary, Harry was suddenly reminded that here was another person with whom he must have a serious interview.

"Stop a bit, Hibbs," he said, as they came face to face. "Come into my room. There is something I want to say to you."

Together they entered the room. Ten minutes later Hibbs emerged. His naturally ruddy face was crimson. His light hair was tousled where he had nervously run his fingers through it, as was his habit when agitated. He had removed his spectacles and his dark blue eyes appeared almost black with excitement. He was angry. More angry than he had ever believed it possible for him to be. He clinched and unclinched his white, shapely hands and ground his teeth together as he strode down the corridor.

"Damn him!" he muttered. "Damn him! Who the devil does he think he is? Hasn't a penny to his name. The blooming beggar! I'll —I'll—By gad, I'll do something desperate. Balfour House! Bah!—A fine place for anyone to live! A haunted house—a place of mystery—shadowed by tragedy! He's courting disaster if he goes there, mark my words."

CHAPTER TWO

ANOTHER MYSTERY

"POOR MISS LUCY!"

Two days elapsed. On the morning of the third day Harry Balfour failed to keep his appointment to ride with his sister, Lucy. Later it was found that his room had not been occupied the night previous. He had dined alone with his sister, Sir James having been detained in town. No one in the household could recall having seen Harry after he left the dining room. It was presumed that he had gone direct to his room. No message nor telegram had come that might have summoned him away.

"Unless," suggested the baronet, reassuringly, "he was somewhere about the grounds and personally met such a messenger. That is most probably the case. Harry is a young man with more than his share of good looks. Possibly some young woman—"

He chuckled and left the sentence unfinished. But the words served to check any feeling of alarm that might otherwise have arisen and for some hours the usual routine of the house remained undisturbed. Hibbs alone seemed nerv-

ous and apprehensive. Lucy was inclined to pout.

Her brother, she declared, had completely spoiled her day. It was inconsiderate and most unlike him to disappoint her. Sir James' suggestion of a sweetheart appealed to her romantic nature but at the same time filled her heart with a sense of jealous resentment that Harry would permit a stranger to come between them.

"I shall scold him when he returns," she said to Sir James as they finished their dessert at dinner. "I had some new music I wanted to play for him this evening."

With feigned petulance she pushed back her chair and rose abruptly from the table. Sir James rose also.

"Can you not play it for me?" he queried, looking down upon her with an indulgent smile. "I may not be able to name the composers but you know I am a good listener."

"Indeed you are, Sir James," returned Lucy, clasping the passive hand of the baronet between her own pink palms as they passed, side by side, through the broad doorway. "You are a perfect dear. When we have had our coffee we will go to the music room and I will play every one of your favorites."

They entered the library, where coffee was usually served, but Hibbs excused himself on the plea of a headache.

"I really believe Mr. Hibbs takes Harry's absence seriously," said Lucy as the secretary

withdrew. "I think myself it is very strange that he should have gone away so mysteriously, without leaving any word. He never did so before."

Again Sir James reassured her.

But Lucy was not wrong in her surmise. Hibbs was indeed visibly disturbed. His face was white and the pupils of his eyes dilated to twice their normal size. His manner was more nervous than usual and he kept looking about apprehensively and listening, like one expecting some direful news or sudden calamity.

It was late in October. Darkness had already fallen. A chill wind was blowing and the mist, which had been increasing throughout the afternoon, had turned into rain. At intervals it smote upon the window panes with low, sobbing gusts that caused Hibbs to shiver as he stood alone by his study window, looking futilely off in the direction of Balfour House.

Of a sudden he turned precipitately, dashed from the room and down a corridor leading to the servants' wing. Bennett, one of the footmen, was in his room. To him Hibbs gave a few hurried directions.

"Of course you need not go," he said in reply to the man's look of surprised inquiry. "Sir James may want you, here. But tell Thomas, the head gardener. He will know what to do. Tell him not to delay."

As the footman hurried away a voice, almost at Hibbs' elbow, addressed him.

"Are you alarmed about Master Harry, Mr. Hibbs?"

The secretary turned, with a perceptible start, and stared at the speaker in surprise.

"Oh, are you here, Anna? I did not see you. Where were you?"

"Right here behind you, Mr. Hibbs. I was coming from the linen room. I stopped to give Bennett some towels. I did not know you were speaking to him confidentially."

"I was not. That is, not exactly. But I would prefer that you say nothing about the matter—for the present."

The woman looked at him rather strangely, Hibbs thought, but she assured him she would say nothing. She would keep her promise, he knew; but he wondered why she should manifest such interest in Harry Balfour.

For Anna Smithson occupied a somewhat peculiar position in the Hamlin menage. To Lucy she was more of a companion than a maid and she had many more privileges than other members of the salaried staff. To what extent she was acquainted with Harry formed a question in Hibbs' mind. Whatever others might believe was the cause of the young man's absence it was evident that she knew, or thought she knew, something of importance which she had so far not chosen to divulge.

She was a comparatively young woman, not yet thirty, with clear, intelligent gray eyes, regular features and a convincing manner. On the stage she might have been a good actress.

Just why she had assumed a semi-menial position no one knew, and Smithson, herself, had not seen fit to explain. She had slipped quietly into her niche at Hamlin House and seemed satisfied to remain there indefinitely.

"I am so glad there is someone interested enough to do something," she now remarked with another keen look into Hibbs' face. "So many things might have happened, don't you think so, Mr. Hibbs?"

What Mr. Hibbs really thought at that moment was not complimentary to Smithson, but he mumbled something that sounded affirmative and started back toward the study whence he had come.

Anna Smithson stood for a second or so looking after his retreating figure, her full, red lips tightly pressed, a strangely calculating expression in her eyes.

"Now I wonder," she mused, "just how much he knows."

An hour or more later several shadowy figures might have been seen cautiously making their way through the tangle of weeds and underbrush that obstructed the grounds of Balfour House. The foremost figure carried a lantern. He proceeded slowly, stopping every now and then to examine the ground before him. Between the wind and the rain the party found progress difficult. At times first one and then another stumbled and almost fell. Except for the meagre rays of the lantern ahead all was inky darkness.

"Heasy, heasy," grunted one of the stumbling figures. "I've bruk my bloomin' leg."

"The divil ye have," retorted another. " 'Tis little betther I am now. Hist! Fwhat was that?"

In the distance a groaning, creaking noise sounded weirdly through the wailing wind. Ahead the lantern continued its bobbing progress in the hand of the man who held it, but its followers lagged.

"S'elp me Gawd, I don't relish this job," exclaimed the first speaker, nervously. " 'Oo was the bally bloke that—"

A limb of a tree crashed to the ground. The man who had been speaking sprang back just in time to avoid its outspread branches. One of his companions caught him.

"Shut yer mouth, Mullins," said another. "This ain't no time nor place to spill yer clack. We'll all be lucky if we get home alive. C'mon, let's get it over with."

They hurried forward, walking as fast as they could, in semi-crouching attitudes, their heads bowed against the storm. Following in the wake of a leader they fetched a great compass round the gardens, skirted the terrace at the south-east corner of the deserted house and vanished in the belt of trees that fringed the lawn at the west.

The groaning, creaking noise increased. It rose to a high pitch, like a wail. Some old board, doubtless, was straining against the wind. At intervals a broken shutter banged

noisily. The rain increased as the drenched and shivering group of men neared the main entrance of the house. When they sought to advance, its violence fairly forced them backward.

Of a sudden their leader pitched forward almost on his face, but as quickly regained his footing and stood rigid. Only for a moment, however. Then the lantern, which he held aloft, slowly lowered and he stooped, cautiously, to inspect the sodden mass over which he had stumbled, almost at the threshold of the house which towered so menacingly before them.

The man's followers made no haste to come forward. Thoroughly alarmed now and apprehensive of the worst, they stood as if paralyzed, fearing almost to draw breath.

A living, tangible foe any one of them would have faced squarely and bravely. A ghostly, supernatural adversary such as was popularly believed to hover over and about Balfour House was an unknown quantity against which human strength and ingenuity would be in vain. They had no wish to jeopardize their lives.

The stooping man half turned and motioned with his lantern for them to join him.

They did so reluctantly, stepping as noiselessly as they could, pushing with unsteady hands the over-hanging foliage to one side and looking, with a mixture of terror and curiosity at that dread Thing over which their companion was bending.

At first glance it seemed nothing but a mass of rain soaked clothes. Then, as the lantern's glow moved slowly to and fro above the heap, it gradually resolved itself into the outlines of a man. He was lying on his face, his arms under his chest as if, in falling, he had made a frantic clutch at his throat.

"Holy Mary, Mother av Mercy!" exclaimed one of the men, piously crossing himself.

"Good Lord! You didn't step on 'im, did you, Tom?" asked another in horror. "Is 'e dead? For Gawd's sake, man, turn 'im over. See who hit is."

But the man addressed as Tom, a stalwart Yorkshireman, who had stumbled over the prostrate form, was too stupefied for action. He had drawn himself erect and now stood, staring dully at the speakers from a face that showed ghastly white against the blackness of the night around them. Throughout their tramp he had stolidly led the way, apparently impervious to fear. Now, in the presence of that grewsome Thing at his feet, his courage failed.

"Noa, lads, noa," he groaned, hoarsely, his teeth chattering. "Ah can do nowt. Tek t' lantern, Gallagher," extending it with numbed fingers to the Irish chauffeur. "Ah'm nut mysen. It's a bad business—a bad business, Ah'm thinkin'."

Gallagher took the lantern or it would have crashed to the ground. But before the others laid hands upon the crumpled form in the grass

Mullins, the groom, pressed forward to view that which had so tragically brought an end to their night's wanderings.

"That's 'im," he exclaimed in an awed whisper. "My Gawd, that's 'im! Hi'd know 'im by the coat. Lift 'im up, lads. Heasy, now. Buck up, Tom. You'll 'ave to lend a 'and 'ere. 'Old the lantern so we can see, Gallagher. We've got to get th' poor lad 'ome, somehow. Gawd! This will break 'is poor sister's 'art!"

"An' how abaout Sir James?" added the Yorkshireman as they lifted their dripping burden and strode off through the cumbrous shrubbery in the direction whence they had come. "He set more store by them two than if they hed been his awn bairns."

" 'Tis not av Sir James I'm thinkin'," came back the voice of the Irishman with the lantern, "but av th' young leddy. They was always together, thim two. Faith, an' this will be a sorry night for poor Miss Lucy. D'ye mind th' cry we heard? That wasn't th' wind, lads. That was the wailin' av th' banshee in th' old clock tower. When th' banshee wails 'tis a warnin' av somethin' more to come—an' poor Miss Lucy's th' last av th' Balfours."

CHAPTER THREE

WHO KILLED HARRY BALFOUR?

"THERE ARE NO CLEWS"

WHATEVER cloud overhung Lucy Balfour, no premonition of it had so far darkened her life. For this, Sir James was, in a measure, responsible. Ever since the day she first entered his luxurious home Lucy's every wish had been gratified. Such indulgence might have proved harmful had she not possessed a sweet and gentle disposition.

She was by nature timid and shrinking; more fond of books and music than of athletic sports. Romance appealed to her. A vivid imagination enabled her to endow those whom she loved, or with whom she was closely associated, with many more virtues and talents than they naturally possessed.

To Lucy, Sir James was as nearly perfect as the father whose memory she so revered; her brother, a chivalrous young hero destined to become renowned; Hibbs, a scholar who would one day be recognized and appreciated in the world of letters; Smithson, a person to be relied upon to perform perfectly whatever serv-

ice was required of her, no matter how difficult or unusual.

It was natural that those to whom Lucy accredited such powers should, in the knowledge of their own deficiencies, make every effort to appear to be all that she believed them to be.

Hibbs, for example, plunged deeper and deeper into antiquated tomes he found in the great library. Though incapable of comprehending their full import in either a literary or scientific way, he found in them sure protection against any loss of Lucy's esteem, since the subjects he invariably selected were equally beyond her grasp. Firm in her conviction that he was a young savant, she accepted without question whatever remarkable theory or statement he propounded.

Even Sir James frequently deferred to Hibbs in matters literary and at times took an interest in some of the obsolete subjects and ancient histories over which his secretary was wont to browse in his spare moments.

Harry Balfour's defiance of Sir James, while in a measure the outburst of long pent-up feelings of inexplicable antipathy and distrust, was, at basis, the sub-conscious reaction to Lucy's belief in his own high ideals and heroism.

As for Sir James, he would no more have spoken harshly nor permitted himself to appear to Lucy in any other character than that of the kindly and affectionate guardian than he would have cut off his right hand.

In truth, members of the household were so well pleased with the respective rôles in which Lucy had so unwittingly cast them that they took the matter seriously and actually believed themselves invested with all the high attributes to which they aspired. Outside their immediate circle, however, were many who failed to share that opinion.

On the evening of the day following Harry's disappearance Sir James gave even more attention to Lucy than was his custom. With deferential tenderness he accompanied her to the music room and listened with seeming enjoyment to her singing.

Once she looked up from some music she was sorting and listened to the rain beating against the windows.

"Oh, I hope Harry is not out in that rain," she exclaimed suddenly. "He'll catch his death." A look of perplexity settled upon her face as she bent her brows in thought. "I simply can't understand it, Sir James," she continued, thrusting the pages of music from her, and turning to face her guardian. "Now why would Harry go away like that without saying anything? He ought to know we would be anxious."

Sir James, who had, himself, been listening intently from time to time as if momentarily expectant of interruption, came over and pinched Lucy's rounded pink cheek.

"Now, now, no borrowing trouble," he said, chidingly. "Troubles always come fast enough

without anticipating them. Probably Harry was called away unexpectedly and had no opportunity to leave a message. I am sure he would not want you to spoil those sweet brown eyes grieving."

"But, Sir James," she protested, "I can't help feeling that perhaps he may have met with an accident—"

A laugh—or what Sir James meant to be a laugh—interrupted her. "Why, I do believe you are nervous," he said. "We can't permit that. I'll tell you what I'll do—if we do not hear anything, or if Harry, himself, does not return by daybreak, I'll notify the police. And if that isn't enough we'll call on that man, Burke, of Scotland Yard, about whom everyone is talking. They say he's a hypnotist. I saw his picture in one of the London papers the other day. He is making a great name for himself."

"Oh, I was reading about him, also," exclaimed Lucy, diverted for the moment, as Sir James had meant her to be. "Smithson had a paper containing a long interview with him. It was about hypnotism, and superstition, and nerves and all such things. I didn't understand half of it but Smithson found it interesting. She spoke to Mr. Hibbs about it but he said it was mere drivel; that the man was only seeking publicity and really knew nothing whatever about those subjects."

"Well, Hibbs is generally right in such matters," returned the baronet, pompously.

"Come now, I have not yet heard those new pieces you were telling me about. Are you going to play them for me?"

"Of course I am."

Lucy arranged the pages upon the piano and was soon absorbed in interpreting a long and rather difficult composition. Sir James watched her thoughtfully. It is doubtful if he was in the least conscious of the music. After a few moments he crossed quietly to the hall door and pulled the bell cord. A butler responded.

"Have my secretary come to me here," Sir James ordered and resumed his contemplation of Lucy. Of his thoughts, however, there was no indication. The smooth face and broad forehead were unlined, the pale blue eyes as expressionless as ever, his air as placid.

When Hibbs appeared at the curtained doorway the baronet stepped softly toward him, taking care not to attract the attention of Lucy, still intent upon the notes before her.

"Has there been any word, Hibbs?" he asked in a low tone.

The secretary gave a startled glance in Lucy's direction and held up a shaking hand to indicate caution. His looks and demeanor were not reassuring. His face worked nervously, his eyes were apprehensive, his fingers twitching. Though his lips formed words no sound escaped them. He nodded toward the hall.

The baronet gathered that he wished to speak with him there, lest Lucy be alarmed.

With a hasty glance to assure himself that she was unaware of their movements, Sir James followed Hibbs quietly into the hall, letting the heavy velvet portieres fall into place behind them.

"Well, what is it?" he inquired icily of the secretary.

Hibbs swallowed hard and pulled himself together. "I insisted, sir, upon their searching the grounds over at the old Balfour Place," he said in a husky whisper. "I—I felt sure you would approve."

The baronet's pale eyes bent searchingly upon his secretary. There was a perceptible tightening about the corners of his mouth as he nodded his head in acquiescence.

"There have been some weird happenings there, as you know, sir," Hibbs continued, seeking to defend the action he had taken and which he sensed did not please his employer. "Ever since Miss Lucy's father—"

Sir James checked him with a gesture. "We are not discussing that now, Hibbs," he remarked reprovingly. "Kindly tell me what you have to tell without digression."

The customary flush surmounted Hibbs' face, dyeing its ordinarily pinkish hue a deep crimson.

"I have been watching from the study window, sir," he went on, hastily. "The men I sent out are returning. I—I couldn't quite make out, but they seem to be—be carrying something—"

Again he paused, this time to glance with sudden accession of horror down the length of the hall to where Smithson stood at a side door, the upper portion of which she had opened for ventilation, peering out into the night in the manner of one whose attention was riveted by some shocking sight.

Almost simultaneously came the tread of heavy feet on the gravel walk and up the steps of the little portico upon which the door opened.

With a cry of horror the woman drew shudderingly back, then as quickly suppressed her emotion and sprang to fling open the lower half of the door.

But Sir James and Hibbs were almost as quick. Together they reached her side as the man, Gallagher, still bearing his flickering light, strode into the hall, followed by the bearers of that lifeless, dripping form they had known as Harry Balfour.

Silently the men deposited their burden and stepped back, wiping the rain from their faces. They waited for someone to speak.

"Where—where did you find him?"

Hibbs gasped out the words involuntarily. He did not know he uttered them. His eyes stared at two red marks on the dead boy's throat.

"Right near the main entrance, sir," one of the men replied. " 'E was lyin' on 'is face with—"

What might have been a shudder caused Sir

James' shoulders to move as if wincing from a blow. He had not drawn near.

"Is he dead?" he asked in a low, even tone, thus repressing details the speaker had been anxious to give.

Hibbs turned quickly to face Sir James. Mechanically he raised his fingers to his own throat but before anyone could speak there came an interruption.

Lucy, at the sound of the men's tread on the gravel walk had paused in her playing to listen. She heard them ascend the steps and cross the floor of the portico. Turning, she discovered Sir James had left the room. With quick alarm, she sprang up from the piano and ran into the hall. That was the moment Sir James asked the question.

It was answered by a terrified scream. Another instant and Lucy, ignoring all efforts to restrain her, was on her knees beside her brother's lifeless form.

"Harry, Harry," she moaned piteously. "Oh, speak to me, Harry. Oh, Harry, darling brother, listen. It's Lucy—sister Lucy, calling you, dear. Can't you hear me? Can't you see me? Oh, Harry, I can't live without you—I cannot—I cannot—"

Strong arms closed about her and drew her forcibly away. But not before she had pointed with tragic, shaking hand to those ominous marks on her brother's throat.

"Look—oh, look," she wailed. "It was not an accident. Look at what they've done.

They've killed him! Someone has murdered my brother!"

Exhausted by the excess of her grief Lucy collapsed in Sir James' arms and allowed herself to be led away by Smithson. The latter's face was grave and colorless.

"I had a presentiment that he had been murdered," she remarked in an unmoved, monotonous voice to Hibbs as the latter followed behind them, distractedly suggesting one thing after another for Lucy's health and comfort.

But the poor girl neither saw nor heard him. She was oblivious of everything but her grief.

The days that ensued were like a hideous dream, not only to Lucy but to everyone concerned. All the investigation and ceremonial that had followed close upon the tragic death of Roger Balfour so many years before, were now re-enacted after the mysterious death of his son.

Now, as before, local authorities made every effort to solve the mystery and apprehend the murderer. Now, as before, Sir James assumed all the expenses of such investigation, asking only that it be completed as expeditiously as possible; that for Lucy's sake the strain might not be unduly prolonged.

Because of the wide-spread sympathy for the doubly bereaved girl this request on the part of Sir James was highly commended and readily granted.

After a perfunctory questioning of various members of Sir James' household and a

brief inspection of the grounds of Balfour House it was decided that Harry Balfour came to his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown, the murderer presumably a vagrant who had been concealed about the grounds or who had been in the act of forcing an entrance to the house when surprised by the young owner of the estate.

Of the conversation between himself and Harry a few nights previous, when Harry had announced his intention of taking up his residence at Balfour House, Sir James said nothing. Nor did Hibbs think it necessary to mention his brief interview with Harry in the latter's room that same evening.

Smithson, when interrogated, surprised everyone by asserting that she had seen from her window the figure of a man proceeding in the direction of Balfour House on the night of the crime, and that she was positive the figure was not that of Harry Balfour.

No one doubted that the man seen by Anna Smithson was the murderer; yet no one was found who could answer the all-important question: Who was the man?

To those who sought information as to his identity Sir James always sorrowfully declared, "There are no clews."

CHAPTER FOUR

HYPNOTIC HYPOTHESES

"I WILL BRING YOU THE PROOF"

Chief Detective Inspector Burke, of Scotland Yard, was dining with the Assistant Commissioner at the head of the Criminal Investigation Department.

It was the latter's custom to entertain his chief subordinates at his home on occasion. A chat across a dinner table, he opined, permitted more intimate confidences and a better personal acquaintance than routine reports and interrogations over an official desk. Now, he leaned back in his chair and slowly lighted a cigar.

"I recently saw an illustrated magazine article on 'Deserted Country Residences of England,'" he remarked in the casual tone of a man making conversation. "One of those pictured was Balfour House."

Burke nodded. "I let them have the photograph," he returned, slowly stirring his coffee. "It reproduced very well, I think."

The Assistant Commissioner glanced

sharply at the grave-faced, stern-jawed speaker. No one knew better than he the relentless, bull-dog tenacity of Burke. If the Chief Detective Inspector had given out that picture for publication he had an object in view. The brows of the Assistant Commissioner narrowed.

"Strange case, that," he observed colloquially. "Father a suicide—more than five years ago; and son mysteriously murdered as soon as he becomes of age. Time flies. It must be about six months since that happened."

"Seven," corrected Burke. "Time the case was disposed of. Personally I never believed that Roger Balfour shot himself, though I admit the evidence all pointed that way. I had my suspicions at the time, but not a thread on which to hang them. The son's death was plainly a murder. It confirmed my suspicions that a master criminal was at work. As you know, sir, when the case was turned over to me I advised apparent inactivity. The local police were given *carte blanche*. Their final report stated that, at the request of Sir James Hamlin and with his active co-operation, a full and unusually swift investigation had been made, but without result. There were no clews to the assassin."

The Assistant Commissioner raised his glass of liqueur and watched the changing hues of the amber Chartreuse. "But you have clews?"

"Clews, yes; plenty of clews but no evi-

dence of guilt." Burke paused to sip his liqueur in the manner of a connoisseur. "Nothing to justify an arrest, nor convict anyone if an arrest were made," he continued after a pause. "There were no witnesses to either crime. There is not even circumstantial evidence to cast suspicion upon any individual."

"How, then, do you plan to dispose of the case?"

"By testing out my often repeated theory that a person guilty of crime will, in hypnosis, and under proper conditions, re-enact the crime."

The Assistant Commissioner smiled but offered no comment. He knew his man. Burke had spent most of his life in the Criminal Investigation Department. He possessed all the traditional qualities of the Scotland Yard detective and his record of success in criminal cases was almost unbroken. He knew how to get to the bottom of crimes that were out of the usual order and was capable of most intricate feats of deduction. His versatility and daring had won for him considerable renown.

He wore his honors modestly enough, and when praised for any of his achievements would invariably reply,

"Nothing at all, sir; merely performance of duty. All in the day's work. We do not pretend to do miracles, but it is a tradition of the service that we always get our man. And we seldom play lone hands. It's team work that

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *London After Midnight.*

JULES COWLES AND THE SEARCHERS FIND THE BODY OF HARRY BALFOUR.

counts. One man may do the planning, but without perfect co-operation on the part of those who are working under him in carrying out those plans he could accomplish nothing. When I am on a case I pay particular attention to the selection of my assistants. Any failure on their part would mean failure for me."

"You have chosen your subject then, I infer," the Assistant Commissioner remarked finally, when it appeared that his Chief Inspector was waiting for him to speak.

"Yes—and no," replied Burke. "I have my suspicions, as I said before, but the clews that have been brought in by several confidential operatives vary. I may have to revise my ideas somewhat after I have been on the ground."

"You have not yet been down, then?"

"No. The criminal is subtle. Nothing less than a full confession will ever convict him. I propose to get that confession."

"By hypnotism? I doubt its acceptance in court." The Assistant Commissioner seldom negatived proposals made by his chief subordinates. Now, he was merely puzzled.

The Chief Inspector explained. "Please don't misunderstand me, sir. I assure you, my subject will be keenly conscious when that confession is made. Hypnotism, used scientifically, is bound to become of great value to us as well as to the medical profession. That is why I have been devoting so much of my spare

time to its study. This is my first opportunity to put it to the test."

"And the picture of Balfour House in the magazine is—"

"A decoy. The house has been tenantless ever since Roger Balfour's death. In fact, no real effort has been made to find a tenant. It is in bad repute. The published picture revealed it as a charming and picturesque old mansion. Interest in the house may be awakened and some tenant pop up who would find it just what he has been seeking."

Again the Assistant Commissioner covertly studied his guest.

"Very interesting," he remarked at length. "I presume I shall not be seeing you again for some time, then?"

"I am afraid not, sir. I expect to be very busy."

"How many men will you require?"

"Three or four, perhaps." Burke's eyes narrowed as he considered the question. "I've already procured my most important assistants."

"I foresee another coup that will bring us fresh laurels," the Assistant Commissioner said as they rose from the table and he led the way into the library. "Help yourself to any of these books," he added, indicating the well-filled shelves. "You'll find a little of everything, including hypnotism."

"Thanks. I'll be glad to," returned Burke, striding over to one of the sections marked

"S" and scanning the volumes as if in search of one in particular. He pulled one of the larger books from its place and turned the pages with interest. "Here's one I can use," he said, quickly. "It is about what I was looking for. May I take it with me?"

"By all means," answered his host, settling himself comfortably in a chair by an open window. "And if you want to converse with another enthusiastic student of hypnotism I would suggest that you look up that man who advocates its use as an anaesthetic."

"I agree with him fully," declared Burke. "He has the right idea. And if anyone tells you that a person who has a crime on his conscience will not, if permitted to follow his own inclinations when in hypnosis, endeavor to reenact the crime, you may safely assure him to the contrary. I have made enough preliminary experiments to satisfy myself. I am now going to satisfy the public."

"Satisfying the public is more difficult sometimes than solving a murder mystery," remarked the Assistant Commissioner, dryly. "I don't envy you your task."

Burke smiled one of his canny smiles that wrinkled the corners of his eyes and suggested much unrevealed knowledge.

"I admit," he said, "that much depends upon the subject's nervous and mental condition. Much preliminary and seemingly unnecessary preparation is involved, just as in any major surgical operation. The question

at issue is, can hypnotism be applied to still the conscious mind of a guilty person and produce the normal re-action of his sub-conscious mind to his own vicious impulses; providing the hypnotic suggestion is previously given him that the period in which he is living is the same as when the crime was committed, and the physical conditions surrounding him are similar to those existent at that time. I say it can be done. The next time I dine with you, sir, I will bring you the proof."

CHAPTER FIVE

A BETROTHAL

"MY LIFE SHALL PROTECT YOURS"

The pleasant days of summer were already bringing back to Lucy's pale cheeks some of the bloom that tears and grief had worn away. Only years could efface the shock of her brother's death. With the resiliency of youth she had rallied after the first overwhelming horror, but its memory would ever remain to sadden and oppress her at times, as did that earlier memory of her father lying dead in the room where, but a few hours before, she had kissed him good-night.

Now the Hamlin roses were in full bloom. Their fragrance filled the air; their soft, velvet petals bestrewed the ground. Their exquisite colors, ranging from creamy white to deepest crimson, were revealed against a background of luxuriant shrubbery in every shade of green. The arbor and summer house over which they clambered were artistic triumphs of the architect's skill.

Here Lucy loved to wander or sit, hours at a time, with a book or some dainty needle-

work, inhaling the scent of the flowers, listening to the songs of birds, trying bravely to forget the heart-breaking past and live in the beauty of the present. To the future she gave no thought.

She only knew that day by day young Hibbs was stepping more and more into Harry's vacant place, and that she found in his companionship her greatest comfort.

On this day in early June she was waiting for him, there among the roses. But when she observed him, coming across the closely clipped lawn to join her, a generous color dyed her face and neck and her eyes brightened as she turned her back, with shy coquettishness, pretending to adjust a wilful branch of the rose vine that had brushed against her arm.

He thought she did not see him and approached stealthily, to surprise her.

Sensing his object, Lucy continued apparently unconscious of his presence until she heard herself addressed:

"Ah! Here I am, Miss Balfour. Did you think I was not coming?"

With a little cry of feigned surprise, Lucy whirled about and faced him.

"Oh, Mr. Hibbs! How you startled me."

"I'm sorry. I was so eager to get here, you know. I thought you would scold me for being late. I assure you it was not my fault. Sir James detained me."

Lucy sat down on a marble bench and looked with wide, questioning eyes up into his face.

"Are you late?" she queried in evident amazement. "How stupid of me. Did you tell me you were coming out this afternoon? I must have forgotten."

Had Hibbs possessed a keener sense of humor he would have detected the spirit of mischief underlying the words. Being a serious young man, an expression of pained surprise over-spread his countenance.

"Why—why," he stammered confusedly, "I told you at luncheon, Miss Balfour. I said —you told me, you know—Oh, I say, you are making game of me. You do remember about the little book of poems we were going to read. You're just spoofing."

For Lucy, in her amusement at his discomfiture, had laughed merrily.

"You are so funny, Mr. Hibbs," she told him. "So very, very serious. Did you really think I had forgotten?"

"I did not know what to think. You are a good actress, Miss Balfour."

Again she laughed.

"Sir James says you are a good secretary—a splendid man for a position of trust."

He sat down on the bench beside her, his dark blue eyes strangely luminous, his round, boyish face absurdly grave.

"Do you believe that?" he asked, taking her small hand and holding it in the palm of his own while his look went slowly from her startled eyes to the delicate blue veins upon it and back again—a look which had all the passion

of a caress. It brought the blood to her cheeks, but she did not draw away.

"Why shouldn't I?" she countered a little breathlessly. "Sir James believes it."

The young man's mouth set a trifle more firmly. He leaned toward her, bending close until his lips almost touched her hair. "Would you trust me," he whispered.

"I have always trusted you, Mr. Hibbs. I am sure that some day you will be famous." The loud throbbing of Lucy's heart almost choked her. She fluttered like a bird as Hibbs raised her hand in his and pressed it tenderly against his cheek.

The words which he had been longing to speak for months clamored for expression. Never, he thought, had Lucy looked so beautiful. He felt himself helpless, like a man drifting over a precipice, yet having no desire to save himself from the inevitable.

"Ever since I came here," he murmured passionately into her shell-pink ear, "I have cared for you as the average man does not care for a woman. You have been an incentive, an aim to me. God knows how I have struggled to make myself worthy of you; to live up to all your ideals; to serve you in any way I could. You were the first person that saw my capabilities and took an interest in my career. That was the reason I loved you as I did. And now—oh, Miss Balfour, please don't think me presumptuous, but—"

His tone rose, vibrant with the impetuous-

ness of his utterance and, as her golden-brown head sank lower, he pressed more closely toward her but made no move to take her in his arms. To him she was an exalted creature, little less than angelic, to be adored but not to be caressed with careless abandon.

"It has not been easy for me to know that you were suffering and that I, of all the world, had no right to comfort you or help you as I longed to do," he continued, speaking with more than his usual nervous rapidity. "Will you not give me the right, Miss Balfour? I have only my love to offer—and your brother said it was not enough; but if I thought you cared for me, even a little, I could face the future with more courage."

He paused. Lucy remained silent. He could not observe her face.

"You don't speak," he exclaimed. "You are offended. It is, as your brother said, out of place for me to presume—"

At the first mention of her brother, the love-light that had been shining, unseen by Hibbs, in Lucy's downcast eyes, had given place to an expression of pain. Now she drooped forlornly against him, like a bird with a broken wing, dumbly seeking the comfort of which he had spoken.

"I—I would not think you pre—presumptuous," she faltered, "if you did not call me 'Miss Balfour' all the time. It sounds so—so—"

Though the words were vague the tone in

which they were spoken was illuminating. Even a stronger man than Hibbs would have found its alluring tenderness irresistible. In an instant his arms enfolded her, crushing her to him with unspeakable joy, while he covered her flushed, tear-wet, yet happy face with kisses.

"Lucy—darling," he whispered almost reverently in his ecstacy of happiness. "Do you mean it, sweetheart? Do you love me? Let me hear you say it. Say, 'I love you, Jerry.' "

"I—I love you—Jerry."

With a sound that was very like a sob, Jerry Hibbs pressed his lips to the rosebud mouth that had so willingly repeated the words he asked.

"And no man ever loved a woman more than I love you," he breathed in all sincerity, his adoring gaze drinking in the beauty of her tender, limpid eyes.

For with Jerry Hibbs, the desire to be eloquent was second nature. He was capable of deep emotion. His efforts to express his feelings in words equally intense usually led to erudition. It was often said of him that to hear him talk at length was equivalent to reading a book. But no thought ever entered Jerry's mind that his diction was stilted, his phraseology exaggerated and many of his pet expressions lacking in originality. With Lucy his only auditor he reveled in rhetorical flights.

"No more sorrow shall come to you as long as I live," he told her, while his hand stroked

her gold-brown head as gently as her mother might have done. "I defy all the powers of evil that have brought disaster to Balfour House. They shall never harm you save over my dead body. The love of my heart is yours. My life shall protect yours."

Lucy listened entranced. The burning fervor of the words seemed to transport her to another world. With a blissful sigh of inexpressible content she closed her eyes and leaned her head against his breast with the graceful abandon of a child.

"Jerry, you're wonderful," she whispered. "Simply wonderful. I—I never dreamed that love would be like this."

For a long time they sat there, among the roses, oblivious of everything but their own, new-found happiness. Then the slanting rays of the sun penetrated their retreat, warning them of the lateness of the hour.

With an exclamation of dismay Lucy disengaged herself from Jerry's arms and smoothed her tumbled curls.

"Oh, I wonder what Sir James will say," she faltered, in sudden alarm. "He may not approve."

The same thought had just presented itself to Hibbs. "Perhaps," he suggested with evident doubt as to the manner in which the baronet would receive the news of their betrothal, "it would be advisable for us not to inform him just at present. He—he might dispense with my services."

"And send you away? Oh, Jerry!"

That possibility was, in itself, a conclusive argument for silence; but to Lucy, the idea of keeping their beautiful romance a secret, even from her guardian, had instant appeal. The glamour of love was far too brilliant for the discernment of wisdom, had either possessed any at the moment.

Later, when they would have broached the subject, the chain of events already being forged by fate to enmesh them was destined to hold them speechless in its sinister embrace.

CHAPTER SIX

UNCANNY TENANTS

"I WILL SIGN THE LEASE"

UNDER the spreading branches of a large tree two men stood talking to one another in subdued tones.

"Look! The light is gone."

"No, it isn't. It is still moving. See, there it goes into the west wing."

"My word! They're taking time enough. Must have more courage than I have. I wouldn't set foot in that house on a wager. How in the world did you come upon these people, old chap? I supposed your office had given up all thought of ever leasing this place. What did they do? Advertise it rent free?"

" 'Sh! Not so loud. It was near here, somewhere, that young Balfour was murdered. Beastly weird spot. Gets on my nerves. No, we didn't advertise. Haven't had an advertisement in *The Times* for years. These people saw a picture and description of Balfour House (murders eliminated) in a magazine. To-day they came into our office about closing time and insisted upon viewing the premises

without delay. If satisfactory, the man said he would take possession at once."

"Well, I'll be damned! How did Sir James receive the news?"

"He didn't receive it. I tried to get into communication with him but he was not about. His secretary told me to go ahead and make out the lease, if I found the applicant's references satisfactory; said it would be to the young lady's advantage to have a tenant on the property, and to ask as high rental as the applicant would be willing to pay. There was nothing the matter with the man's references, so I gave him the keys and suggested, since he was in such haste, that he come down and inspect the house while I made out the papers. Then you popped in and—"

"You dragged me out here with you to witness your transaction under cover of darkness. Think I want to get killed, too? Do they know where to find you when they come out—if they ever do?"

"I told them I would be waiting under this tree, but that nothing would induce me to enter the house."

"Right-o! Nor me. By Jove, I believe they're coming now. They've opened the front door. Look! The woman is holding the light up for him to see the steps. She's going to stop inside while he joins us. I say, they must have steady nerves, that pair."

"Keep quiet. He'll hear you."

But other eyes and other ears than those of

the two waiting clerks were interested in the flickering light and strange, black-clad figures visible within the old gray walls of Balfour House.

A horse and cart jogged slowly along the main road, in the direction of the Hamlin estate. Two persons, a man and a woman, occupied the driver's seat.

The woman was first to notice the moving light in the old house, so long abandoned. Her sudden clutch on the arm of the man who was driving caused him to give a violent jerk to the reins, bringing the horse up with a start.

"Thomas!" she exclaimed in a tone of mingled fright and amazement. "There's a light in Balfour House."

"Where?" he ejaculated, staring, open-mouthed, through the gathering darkness.

"There—right there, in the west wing. See! It's moving right along. As I live, there's somebody in that house."

Thomas made no attempt to dispute the statement. He could see not only the light but the tall, formless, black figure that seemed to be responsible for its wanderings. Another dark spectre moved in advance. Slowly the two progressed from room to room. Then the light disappeared, only to reappear a moment later in the main entrance hall. Its uncanny flickering, first at one window and then at another, was like the flight of a gigantic fire-fly, or a will-o-the-wisp.

The big Yorkshireman sat as if petrified, the

memory of his last inspection of the Balfour grounds still vivid within him. He had no desire to linger in the vicinity, but found himself, for the moment, incapable of thought or action.

"Thomas, that is a woman!"

"Ay, soa it is, lass."

"But who on earth can it be?"

Thomas drew a deep breath and replied with awful solemnity.

"T' laady from t' dead, lass. Ah've heered 'ow she gooes out a-walkin o' evenin's seekin' coompany, an' its nut a lee nawther. You see her, now, for yo'sen."

"Nonsense!"

Anna Smithson, who had accompanied Thomas to the village to fetch home the luggage of a guest Sir James was expecting, prided herself upon being extremely practical. But Thomas did not hear her involuntary exclamation of incredulity. His eyes were riveted upon the open door of Balfour House in which the outlines of a man were clearly silhouetted against the dim, yellowish light that brightened the interior. The man appeared to be tall, but very stooped and mis-shapen. A long, black Inverness coat enshrouded his seemingly emaciated figure. He also wore a high, narrow-brimmed beaver hat.

Thomas looked, gave vent to a muttered exclamation, then brought his whip down over the horse's back with such energy that the poor creature plunged forward almost at a run. Anna Smithson had to cling firmly to the seat

to avoid being tumbled over into the back of the cart.

As it sped forward and disappeared around a bend in the road the man who had paused for a moment in the doorway descended the steps of the old mansion, crossed the very spot where the body of Harry Balfour had been discovered, and proceeded slowly toward the tree under which the two clerks from the lawyer's office stood waiting.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he remarked in a deep, sonorous voice as he neared them.

"Good evening, sir," they replied with some trepidation. Both the man's manner and appearance were disturbing in a vague, intangible way which both clerks were quick to sense but which neither could have explained.

"I hope I did not keep you waiting."

"It was quite all right, sir; we did not mind. I hope you'll pardon us, sir, for not coming into the house but—"

A nervous shudder completed the sentence in a manner more expressive than words.

The stranger nodded, gravely. "I understand," he said. "You are quite right to avoid scenes and places that have a melancholy and depressing effect upon the mind. With me it is different. Mundane affairs are nothing to me. I have neither memory nor imagination. The fact that this old house harbors, no doubt, many mysteries beyond the solution of man, will not in the least disturb my tranquillity nor that of my associates."

He paused and raised a long, strangely yellow hand to his pallid face and brushed aside a lock of dark hair that had fallen slightly over his right temple. Both clerks, commenting upon the incident afterward, were positive they saw what seemed to be a lurid wound which, until then, the dropping lock of hair had concealed. As neither of the two made any remark, the stranger continued speaking.

"I have spent considerable time looking through the house. It is more interesting than I had supposed. It seems, however, to have been sadly neglected since it was last occupied."

His dark, piercing eyes gleamed somewhat disconcertingly, and his smile was not reassuring. The man with the papers in his hand made quick reply.

"You understand, sir, the owner will make no repairs."

The stranger nodded acquiesence.

"It is a valuable property," he said. "It is unfortunate that it should be permitted to fall into decay, but 'so passeth away all earthly glory.' A little time and we, also, shall not be here. Life is a mystery no man can solve. It extends beyond the grave."

The deep tones of the speaker were in harmony with the loneliness of the place. One of the clerks gave a quick, surreptitious tug at the coat of his companion. He was eager to be gone. The other, no less perturbed, hastily unfolded the document which, until that mo-

ment, he had been nervously fumbling. Instantly the stranger extended his hand.

"You have brought the necessary papers," he observed. "Very good. I will sign the lease."

At that moment an eerie cry resounded through the summer twilight. It commenced sharply on a low note, rose in a piercing crescendo, sustained itself for a few seconds in a mournful wail and as suddenly died away into silence.

Involuntarily the stranger in the Inverness cloak and beaver hat raised his head and scanned the tree tops, but almost as quickly brought his gaze back to the legal paper which the thoroughly alarmed clerk now thrust into his hands.

The clerks exchanged meaningful glances while the stranger read, or appeared to read, by means of the dim light, the terms by which, for a specified period of time, he would be permitted to occupy Balfour House as a tenant. Neither of the two dared whisper what was in his mind lest the prospective tenant decline to lease a property, the controlling influences of which were a ghost and a banshee.

"What was that?" exclaimed the one who had accompanied the man bringing the lease.

" 'Sh," whispered the other. "The gentleman is reading."

"What was what?" queried the latter, raising his gleaming eyes from the paper before him. "I did not hear anything, did you?" His

tone was cold, calm and even. Nothing had disturbed him. Yet his smile was horrible.

The two clerks were incapable of reply. To them his deliberation was maddening. The slow, methodical manner in which he affixed his signature to the paper gave them chills. The man was positively uncanny. Neither of them ever wanted to see him again after they once got away from his presence. They hardly waited to watch him re-enter the house after the lease was signed and its custodian had it safely buttoned up within the breast pocket of his coat. Scuttling away through the shrubbery they made off with all speed for the home of Sir James Hamlin.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SIR JAMES RECEIVES A SHOCK

"HIS NAME! HIS SCRIPT!"

"BILLINGS, I have been asked by Sir James to tell you that every possible attention must be shown Colonel Yates when he arrives. The Colonel has seen long service in India, it is possible his health has suffered. He may desire some of his food specially prepared. He may like a fire in his room quite frequently. You will see to it that he is served well and promptly."

"Certainly, Mr. Hibbs."

"And—Billings, did Mullins drive down for the luggage that was sent in advance? There is some uncertainty as to just what time Colonel Yates will come. It is important that his luggage be here, you know."

Billings, who had served Sir James Hamlin many years, was accustomed to receiving orders through the baronet's secretary, but as a butler of dignity he did not fancy explaining to that young man his usually good reasons for carrying out those orders according to his own judgment instead of observing Hibbs' direc-

tions to the letter, for Hibbs was a martinet. Now, the butler hesitated before replying.

"I asked you a question, Billings."

"Yes, Mr. Hibbs, the cart was sent down."

"It should be back by now. Did you tell Mullins not to delay?"

"Mullins did not go, Mr. Hibbs. It was Thomas 'as wanted to get something special for the roses, to kill the bugs, and 'e said 'as 'e would pick up the Colonel's luggage at the station as he came by. Oh, Thomas will not tarry," he added hastily, before Hibbs could deliver the scathing reprimand that was trembling on his lips. "Smithson rode with him. She went to do an errand for Miss Lucy."

That was tactful of Billings to mention Lucy's name. His years of training in the art of being seen and not heard had sharpened his powers of observation. He, at least, was not unaware of the secretary's love affair. At his words the little frown that had been gradually deepening between Hibbs' brows smoothed itself out.

"I dare say they will be here, shortly," he remarked, and was turning away when the door into the servants' hall opened and Smithson entered.

"Oh, we've had such a shock," she exclaimed, dropping limply into a chair. "I don't know which used me up the most, what I saw at Balfour House or Thomas' mad driving to reach home and safety ahead of the witches."

Hibbs turned at the words.

"Balfour House!" he repeated, with evident consternation. "What did you see at Balfour House?"

The woman focused her large, gray eyes full upon him and studied his face curiously.

"Lights—people—weird people—a man and a woman," she announced dramatically for the benefit of the servants who now clustered about, showering her with questions.

"Are you sure?" questioned Hibbs, incredulous.

"Absolutely!" she returned. "Here's Thomas. He can tell you more than I can. He knows who the lady is."

Although Anna's face was serious, her tone tinctured with awe, and her eyes wide and startled in expression, the Yorkshire gardener who entered at the moment had the impression that she was laughing at him. The others, however, seemed not to notice anything peculiar. They begged him for details.

"Theer niver wor sich a laady as t' one we seed," he averred. "Niver alive. Dead she wor—an' soa wor 't mon. Ah knaw," he added emphatically, bringing his great, hairy fist down upon the table with such force as made the dishes rattle, "becus he wor a mon thot Ah, mysen, seed laid i' t' graave. Anna an' me, we gooes by i' t' cart. We seed summat thot wor nut o' thees warld—an' we coomed away fairly bewitched!"

The man was so plainly convinced of the truth of his statement that his hearers were

more impressed than they cared to admit even to one another. Each recalled something he or she had seen, heard or experienced in a supernatural way; and during the evening many of the tales concerning Balfour House were retold for the edification of those who had not already heard them.

As Thomas finished his recital, Hibbs quietly left the room, followed a moment later by Billings, whose quick ear was always the first to detect the sound of wheels entering the driveway.

He reached the main entrance in time to open the door for Sir James, who was then just descending from his car. The baronet entered, followed by his chauffeur, the latter laden with several books and parcels which he placed upon the table in the great hall.

Hibbs, who was also present, inquired if Sir James had found the weather uncomfortable in town and if there was anything he would like to have done before dinner.

Assuring his secretary that his day had been very delightful and that, for the present, he required no service, the baronet was about to go to his rooms when a ring at the door caused them all to turn in that direction. The two men waiting there were the same ones who had waited under the tree at Balfour House.

Billings evidently knew the callers, for he admitted them without question; but before he could cross the hall and announce them to Sir James, that gentleman had affixed his glass to

his eye and was surveying them in dignified astonishment.

"Well?" he inquired, at length, of the two perspiring and breathless men who had thus forced themselves upon his notice. "You wished to see me?"

"It's about a tenant for the old Balfour Place," the foremost explained, at the same time feeling in his pocket for the lease, the signing of which had given himself and his companion such an unpleasant half-hour.

"A—a what?" exclaimed the baronet, opening his eyes so wide with amazement that his glass fell out.

"A tenant, sir," repeated the clerk, who had, with some difficulty, extracted the lease from his pocket and now stood, respectfully proffering it for inspection. "Here is the lease, sir. The gentleman has already taken possession."

Sir James recovered his eye-glass, placed it in his eye again and stared anew.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "Bless my soul."

It was plain that his momentary confusion was not the result of joy at learning that the property of which he was the custodian had again become a source of revenue.

"Perhaps," suggested Hibbs, who now wished that he had been less precipitate in giving his sanction to the proceeding, "Sir James would prefer to discuss this matter in the library."

"Yes, yes. The library, by all means,"

gasped Sir James, much in the manner of a fish gasping for water.

He turned and pattered ahead as one hurrying from something disagreeable or threatening. When the others reached the library he was already seated at his desk. There, he seemed to feel more at ease.

"Now," he commenced, after again adjusting his eye-glass, "what is this business about a lease?"

Hibbs undertook to explain, speaking rapidly as was his wont and in his most placating manner.

"But I did not understand, sir," he said in conclusion, "that the gentleman was to take immediate possession. I inferred that he was merely to inspect the premises, arrange terms and complete the transaction later. I am very sorry, sir, if anything has been done of which you would not approve. I recalled, of course, your having mentioned frequently the desirability of letting Balfour House to a tenant of unlimited financial resources."

"Yes, yes. Quite so," interrupted Sir James, again adjusting his eye-glass and slowly unfolding the copy of the lease which Hibbs now placed before him, having taken it from the hand of the perplexed clerk. "But have we any assurance that this tenant is solvent?" he queried with some asperity.

"We have never had higher references, sir," interjected the man who had brought the document, "and payment for the full term of rental

has been made in advance. I told him, sir, that you would make no repairs."

This information served to restore to the baronet something of his customary bland and placid manner.

"Quite right," he observed. "Quite right. Well, we will now see what this agreement is that your moneyed gentleman has signed."

With which pleasantry his cold blue eyes rapidly scanned the printed form before him. Having done so to his satisfaction he flung back the page and glanced at the signature at the conclusion of the document.

Instantly his florid face went white. He leaned back in his chair and gulped twice as if on the verge of choking. Hibbs stepped forward hastily.

"What is it, sir?" he asked with concern. "Shall I ring for a glass of water?"

But the baronet did not wish any such attention. Like one in a daze he passed his hand slowly across his brow, then pointed, with trembling finger to the carefully inscribed name of the new tenant of Balfour House. He moistened his lips in his effort to speak, but the words he uttered were barely audible.

"His name—His script—"

"Whose?"

The baronet did not reply. Hibbs leaned over and scanned the written words that had produced such a disturbing effect upon him.

The name was "Roger Balfour."

CHAPTER EIGHT

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

"COLONEL YATES HAS ARRIVED, SIR"

"SINGULAR, very singular," commented Sir James, nervously tapping the perplexing signature with his lean forefinger. "I cannot understand why the name elicited no attention at the office when the gentleman presented his credentials."

"The book-keeper handled them, sir," explained the man who had attended to the making out of the lease. "He has but recently come from Australia and is not familiar with local affairs. The regular book-keeper is ill. My own understanding was that the gentleman was a remote connection of the Balfour family who, after seeing a picture of the place in a magazine, desired to occupy the ancestral house for a time."

"H'm!" mused the baronet. "There are no such connections that I know of. I regret that I was not consulted before this lease was granted. You have just seen the gentleman. How did he impress you?"

The two realty representatives exchanged

uneasy glances, which did not escape the notice of Sir James.

"You can describe him, can you not?" he inquired testily.

"Oh, yes; certainly, sir," replied the younger man.

"He was most impressive, sir," declared the other.

"I asked for details," persisted Sir James.

Before either of the two could supply the information Billings, the butler, entered the room with a card on a silver tray. He started forward toward Sir James. The latter waved him aside.

"See who it is, Hibbs," he said, impatiently. "See who it is."

Hibbs took up the card and read the name engraved thereon. Consternation registered upon his countenance. He voiced an ejaculation of dismay. Could anything have been more inopportune than the appearance of this uninvited and, until a few hours previous, totally unexpected guest!

It was only at lucheon that Sir James had received the telegram stating that an old friend from India was en route to visit him and had sent his luggage in advance. Ever since the receipt of that message the baronet had been in a devil of a state of mind, trying to recollect the officer and the circumstances of their acquaintance.

"I tell you I can't place him, Hibbs. I can't place him," Sir James had reiterated.

Together they had gone to the library and examined a copy of the Army Register. They found the name they sought but it was not illuminating.

Much perturbed, the baronet thrust the book back in its place on the library shelf.

"It's of no use, Hibbs," he had declared. "We will have to wait for enlightenment until he gets here."

Instructions had accordingly been sent to the servants, but Hibbs knew no serious consideration had been given by anyone to the possibility of an arrival before the morrow.

Now, the unexpected had happened. The guest from India, whoever he was, had materialized.

"Well?"

The querulous interrogation from Sir James caused Hibbs to look up with a start from the card at which he had been staring while these reflections flitted through his mind.

"Oh, I'm sorry—" he faltered. "I—Ah—Colonel Yates has arrived, sir."

Sir James' face appeared suddenly old and drawn. The lines across his forehead deepened and his fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the desk before him. His first impulse was to have the guest shown immediately to the rooms prepared for him. Almost instantly, however, he conceived the idea that it would be the wisest course to re-establish that acquaintance which he had so far been unable to recall, and learn the identity of this unexpected visitor.

It was well that he so decided, for the gentleman from India, in his eagerness to renew that friendship which he seemed to remember so pleasantly, had followed close upon the butler's footsteps and now stood in the open doorway.

He was a large, squarely-built man, stern-visaged and of military bearing. A pince-nez from which depended a slender black cord surmounted his large, well-formed nose. His clothes were of excellent quality and well-tailored, but his tie, Hibbs thought, was atrocious. One forgot all else, however, after one look into his keen, penetrating eyes. Those were his most noticeable feature. They seemed to contain within themselves tiny electrodes from which proceeded a strangely vital force that fascinated the observer against his will. The very atmosphere about the man seemed charged with energy. It was as if great powers were astir and he stood close to the whirling center of it all.

Sir James, meeting his gaze, at once recalled the time and place of their former acquaintance.

"Stupid, very stupid of me to have forgotten," he told himself reprovingly as he greeted his guest with unrestrained cordiality.

"I hope I have not intruded," the latter remarked in a deep, resonant voice suggestive of a tremendous volume of tone sternly restrained, and clipping his words in military manner. "Your hospitable offer to put me up

when I came Home, was too tempting to be ignored. I've looked forward to this moment ever since we parted."

He clasped the baronet's extended hand in a hearty grip and peered into his face as if to read there the story of the intervening years since they last met.

Sir James became conscious of a sense of security. Here was a strong, capable man upon whose judgment one might rely. A friend to be consulted and depended upon.

"My dear colonel," he exclaimed, his thin voice contrasting noticeably with the sonorous tone of the colonel, "this unexpected visit of yours is indeed a pleasure. I'm charmed, delighted, I assure you. And your arrival at this moment is particularly opportune. I've just had a remarkable experience."

"Indeed! Nothing unpleasant, I hope."

The colonel's fiery gaze swept the faces of Hibbs and the two realty representatives in a questioning manner that caused Hibbs much disquietude and elicited from Sir James immediate explanation.

"My secretary and I have just been discussing the signature on this lease which these two men from my solicitors' office have brought me," he said, with some return of his former excitement and taking up the lease in his hand as he spoke. "The signature on it is that of a man who—who is known to have committed suicide on the property more than five years ago!"

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *London After Midnight.*

SIR JAMES HAMLIN LOOKS OFF WORRIEDLY, WHILE LUCY BALFOUR PLAYS FOR HIM.

Colonel Yates removed his pince-nez, balanced them thoughtfully upon his fingers and stared at Sir James in amazement.

"Incredible!" he ejaculated. "Some relative, probably. What is the man's name?"

As if with one accord they all made haste to tell him.

"Roger Balfour!" he repeated after them. "Why, I knew him well. And you say he is dead—took his own life? I can hardly credit it. Seems impossible. So unlike Roger. How long ago did you say it happened?"

"About—about five years," replied Sir James, whose pale face and nervous hands betokened his mental condition. "The handwriting is identical."

His military guest was reassuring. "Merely coincidence," he observed in the casual manner of one brushing aside a troublesome cobweb. "What did the man look like?" This to the two men who had been unable to answer the same question when it had been put to them by Sir James.

"Very peculiar," replied the taller and younger of the two, who had been casting about in his mind for adequate words with which to describe the remarkable old man whose diction was so cultured and smile so terrible. "More ghost-like than human. Seemed to be twisted and mis-shapen. Mostly eyes and teeth."

To those who listened the description savored of a hob-goblin or worse. Sir James

looked perplexed; the colonel mildly amused.

"He was wrapped in a long cloak," the elder of the two clerks supplemented. "I confess, sir, he made me feel creepy. It was almost as if—" he hesitated, loath to express his impressions in words, then courageously spoke his mind. "Yes, sir, it was exactly as if he were an un-holy creature—out of a grave-yard, or something like that. 'Pon my word, sir, I was alarmed when I set eyes on him."

He paused and the colonel laughed.

"Nonsense, nonsense," the latter exclaimed. "You chaps must have been smoking something before you kept your rendezvous with the old gentleman. I'll wager we'll find him a totally different person when we meet him, eh, Sir James? Now if we were in India I'd take more stock in this silly tale. India! Ah, there's the place for occult manifestations. One expects them, there. But here—"

His laugh was contagious. The tension under which they had all been laboring relaxed. Even Sir James was able to force a slight smile as Hibbs and the two clerks withdrew, leaving him alone with his guest.

"Now," said the colonel, drawing up his chair, "let us talk over old times."

CHAPTER NINE

GHOULS

"THE—COFFIN—IS—EMPTY!"

Sir James Hamlin had a strong vein of superstition running through his nature. This fact became more and more apparent as he conversed with Colonel Yates.

The latter was, himself, deeply interested in occultism and supernatural phenomena, he told the baronet. A man he knew in India was believed by natives to have the gift of invisibility and executive control over many devils. He, himself, had made very successful experiments and had some remarkable experiences, he said.

Over the face of Sir James there crept an expression of uneasy dread; of uncertainty, like that of a man who doubts the very ground upon which he stands.

"There is no gainsaying the fact that the signature on the Balfour House lease is a facsimile of others I have among my papers," he remarked, musingly, in the low, subdued tone he always used when disturbed or excited. "Roger's script was extremely individual."

Colonel Yates, who had treated the story of

the two realty agents with such evident incredulity, manifested an altogether different attitude after they had withdrawn and he and Sir James were left alone together.

Appreciating the nervous condition of his host, the colonel had made no attempt to confine the conversation to reminiscences. Instead, he displayed consummate tact in guiding it to the very subjects upon which the baronet's thoughts centered.

"You have, then, made a comparison of the hand-writing," he now observed, thoughtfully.

The baronet shook his head. "No," he replied. "It was not necessary. I would know that writing—anywhere."

"There, of course, I cannot judge your proof," returned the colonel.

Sir James was silent a moment. Then he unlocked a drawer of his desk and from it removed a small packet of letters and legal papers. Holding them endwise, he scanned them quickly, running his finger between them and leafing them over, one by one, until he came to one in particular. This he drew forth, unfolded it and spread it on the desk beside the recently signed lease.

"These are papers," he said, "which concern the old history of the Balfours. They have been handed down from father to son; the information they hold, entailed, as it were, on the eldest son. There are secrets here that belong to the dead. The sudden taking off of both Roger Balfour and his son, Harry, has

left them, temporarily at least, in my keeping."

He seemed to be talking more to himself than to the colonel, speaking in a low monotone that was barely audible. But as he pointed to the duplicate signatures on the two papers he became more agitated; acutely conscious of his guest's presence.

"This will, I am sure, convince you," he added in a louder tone, "that the writing is not a forgery."

The colonel took the papers in his hand and examined the two signatures gravely. Each was an exact counterpart of the other. The writing on both was of sharp, angular character, a style extremely difficult to copy.

"By gad! Sir James," he remarked at length, "I am not surprised that this thing bowled you over. I'd like to see the man who wrote it. You don't suppose, do you, that there was any mistake about Balfour's death? That someone else was buried in his stead, or anything like that, you know?"

Sir James shivered, yet he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his brow. His fingers clinched, his face paled.

"No, no," he replied. "That was impossible. Quite impossible. I—I, myself, saw him —attended his funeral. This—this strange tenant can't be—"

The colonel raised his hand. "Of course not," he interrupted hastily. His keen eyes gleamed with intense thought. He seemed to

be concentrating upon a solution of the mystery. "It couldn't be he—and yet—strange things—stranger things, even, than this have happened in India. In my opinion a man should not ignore all supernatural agency other than the Deity. There are tremendous unseen forces all about us with which the mind of man is totally unable to cope."

Involuntarily Sir James glanced furtively around, as if expecting an emissary from another world to be lurking in the far corner of the long room.

"I don't believe in ghosts," he exclaimed, doggedly. "When people die, they're dead. This is the only world I'm interested in."

His tone, however, was not convincing; his manner belied the bravado of his words. The colonel, apparently, observed neither. To him a favorite topic had been broached. It invited discussion. He leaned forward, speaking with great earnestness. The magnetism of his personality riveted the baronet's attention.

"Ah, but you are wrong. You must be convinced of the truth of these things. You exist; I exist. I put it to your common sense, Sir James, why should there not be ghosts, demons, genii, what you will, gifted with greater powers than ours? There are gradations of being below man to an animalcule—why should there not be as many above him to the Deity? What do you know about death? Only what you see. What do you know about the soul of a bat? Nothing. You've never seen it. Perhaps a de-

parted soul has. Why should you or I deny the power of return to departed souls? Take, for example, the soul of a man—or a woman—who has been wronged. Is it not possible—even extremely probable—that such a soul would be obsessed with a desire to re-visit familiar scenes, to look after the welfare of loved ones, or to harass an enemy?"

Sir James, despite the studied calmness of his demeanor when with Lucy Balfour or in the presence of those he deemed his inferiors, was of a nervous temperament, at times easily influenced, again firm to the point of stubbornness, according to his mental reaction to whatever force against which he found himself in opposition.

In this instance Colonel Yates was by far the stronger personality. In his presence the baronet felt himself unusually helpless. Like a fly, pinned against the wall for scientific inspection with a microscope. He was restless and uncomfortable. This discussion of supernatural matters was not to his liking, coupled, as it was, with that uncanny lease. Suppose the colonel was right. He ought to know. He had made a special study of such things in India. But India was not England. Nothing mysterious and supernatural about England. And yet—there were those stories of Balfour House, believed by most of the servants and tenantry for miles around. Even Hibbs—

Sir James shook himself slightly, for the same reason that a dog shakes himself after

having been immersed in water—to be rid of something unpleasant and clinging.

"No one could sign that name but Roger Balfour," he declared, without attempting to answer the colonel's questions. "And Roger is dead. His body lies in the family mausoleum. You certainly do not mean to imply that he could return in such manner as to act through the body of some living person—as, for example, the man who has leased Balfour House?"

The tone of triumph in which the question was asked, indicated the effort he was making to dispel the harrowing fancies which his guest's words had conjured up in his mind.

But the colonel was not disconcerted. He was like a hunter, thrilled by the scent of a chase. Here he was, on the very eve of his return to England after an absence of years, in the house of a friend confronted by a mystery which, unless cleared up speedily, might cause that friend great discomfort, perhaps serious trouble. As an officer and a gentleman, it was his duty to render every assistance in his power.

Those were his sentiments, and he did not hesitate to express them.

"I was reading a book coming down that dealt entirely upon such subjects," he told Sir James. "It is in one of my bags. Later we will look it over. It is a very old book. Some might call it obsolete, but I tell you the people of that period knew more about spirits and

were in closer touch with the unseen world than we, with all our modern education. If, as you say, no one but Roger Balfour, himself, could write that signature, then I'd say Roger Balfour wrote it."

They separated to dress for dinner and the colonel, meeting Hibbs in the hall outside his room, gave him the book of which he had spoken to Sir James. He suggested that it be placed in the library, where anyone might look it over at leisure. This the young man proceeded to do, pausing to read several paragraphs that attracted his attention. He resolved to return to the library as soon as possible and resume perusal of the weirdly interesting book.

But immediately after dinner Sir James asked Lucy to play and sing for their guest, and Hibbs waited in the music room to turn the pages for her. He was not attracted by the colonel and was particularly annoyed when the latter asked Lucy to walk with him on the terrace. After seeing the two step out the long, French windows into the shadows of the evening Hibbs made his way to the library, only to find that Sir James had preceded him.

The baronet had the old volume open before him and was so absorbed in what he was reading that he did not hear his secretary's approach until the latter addressed him. In his surprise, he dropped the book.

Hibbs apologized profusely and made haste to recover the volume.

"I found it very interesting, myself," he told Sir James. "A study of it is quite apt, sir, to throw light upon the mysteries of Balfour House."

To his amazement, the baronet gave way to a petulant outburst of temper.

"I don't care a damn about illuminating the mysteries of Balfour House," he cried in a thin, sharp tone. "What I want to know is, who wrote Roger Balfour's name on that lease?"

At that instant Colonel Yates joined them.

"But you told me, Sir James, that no one but Roger, himself, could have written his signature in that manner," he observed.

"That's true," returned the baronet.

"Then do you mean a ghost, Sir James?"

"Worse than that, I'm afraid. What you've said to-night, what I've experienced and what I've just read in this book has either overthrown my reason or my ideas. I don't know what to think. Here, read this."

The paragraph to which he called attention was in early English text and phraseology and dealt with vampyrs, defined as dead bodies which left their graves at night to prey upon the living. Hibbs read the passage aloud.

"Men who have died by murder or suicide," he continued, "frequently become vampyrs."

"But you remember, Sir James, you said you did not believe in the supernatural," warned the colonel. "We are not living in the middle ages, you know. I seem to have got you

into this thing; I'd like to see you through. But I confess I don't know where it's leading us."

"I do," returned Sir James, with a return of his habitual manner. "It is going to lead me to the vault where Roger Balfour's body was entombed. Will you come with me, Colonel Yates?"

It was after midnight when they started. Hibbs was not permitted to accompany them. Carrying a lantern and armed with revolvers, Sir James and his guest set forth, taking care not to arouse the sleeping servants. Cautiously and without conversation, they made their way toward the little hillside where, for generations, the Balfours had placed their dead.

Now that they were actually started on their grisly mission the baronet would gladly have turned back. As they walked, the invisible air about them seemed charged with mysterious, unknowable forces. Sometimes Sir James had a sense that they were being followed; that somebody was walking at their heels, almost near enough to touch them.

But when he turned around suddenly he saw nothing. Merely the scudding clouds across a steadily darkening sky, the tall, dark outlines of trees and the dim thread of the path over which they had come.

Again it seemed that something, or someone, was trying to prevent them from going forward, urging them to give up their errand.

But the colonel, with military determination

to attain an objective at all costs, strode steadily onward. The slight figure of the baronet had hard work to keep pace with him.

There was no moon. The few stars that had been visible when they started were fast disappearing. The night was hot and sultry. From a distance came mutterings of thunder.

At the edge of the small wood skirting the Balfour gardens a large, black object flapped almost in their faces, rushed onward with an ominous swishing sound, turned, darted back across their path and went flapping off into the night.

To Sir James it brought a horrible sensation of apprehension of coming misfortune. He felt ill, feverish, and a moment later a succession of chills. Yet he persisted.

The gate of the cemetery was unfastened. The colonel pushed it open with his cane. The two men entered and stood motionless. A great silence enveloped them—the silence of death. The air was still and pulseless. Not a leaf stirred. Jagged tongues of lightening cleft the sky above their heads.

Both men held their breath to catch any sound there might be. They heard—nothing. The awful stillness was oppressive; ominous. Sir James felt himself trembling. He stared fixedly into the darkness.

The colonel was a masterful man; accustomed to lead, not to follow.

"Where is the grave?" he asked.

The words, low-spoken as they were,

seemed to awaken echoes. The slender frame of the baronet shook with the vehemence of his apprehensions. He struggled for speech.

"This—this way," he faltered, indicating a turn to the left. "It's in there—that mausoleum—I have the key."

His hands shook, but he managed to pull the key from his pocket. The last time that key had turned in the lock of the ivy-covered retreat in the hillside was the day when the body of poor Harry Balfour had been deposited there, beside the casket containing the remains of his father.

Now, the memory of that occasion returned to Sir James with a vividness that racked the fibres of his brain.

What was he going to see when the door of that subterranean vault was opened? His steps faltered, and he stood for a moment, to recover himself. The colonel raised the dark lantern he carried and turned its rays upon the door of the vault.

"No one else has been here," he said in a low, hoarse half-whisper. "Will you unlock it or shall I?"

Sir James prevailed upon himself to move toward the forbidding door. He touched the lock with the key but his fingers were powerless. He receded a few steps and looked about helplessly. He was heartily sorry, now, that he had insisted upon making the investigation himself.

"Ghosts be damned!" he muttered under his

breath. "They don't exist. I never believed in them before. I'm not going to be made a fool of, now."

"What's the trouble," came the voice of the colonel. "Doesn't the key fit?"

Sir James was ashamed of his weakness. He stepped back to the door.

"I—I thought I had made—a mistake," he observed between dry lips.

Once more he put his hand to the lock. The key turned with difficulty. He exerted more strength. Slowly the stubborn lock yielded. Once, twice—at the third turn of the baronet's wrist there came a tiny click and the soft, subdued tinkle of a bell that ceased almost as it pealed.

At the sound both men stood hushed, intently listening. Then the baronet, pressing forward with his right arm against the door caused it to swing slowly inward. He drew back, that the rays of the light in the colonel's hand might penetrate the shadows of that chill chamber of death which lay beyond. The silence of the tomb was intolerable. The eyes of the two intruders stared into its depths. Neither spoke. Then, to the ears of both came the sound of a sigh, faint, elusive, trembling off into the space from whence it came.

The colonel involuntarily drew closer within the shelter of the ivy-clad pillars that flanked the grated door. Sir James' fingers gripped his arm. Their very souls were absorbed in the act of listening.

"You heard?" The colonel scarce breathed the question.

A warning movement of the other's fingers against his arm was the reply.

With bated breath they waited. Several seconds passed. Nothing more was heard.

"I'm going in." The colonel spoke the words. He moved forward as he spoke. The baronet kept close beside him.

"Wait," whispered the latter. "This is far enough. I'll look. It's—" he swallowed with difficulty and pointed with a trembling finger, "that second casket. Hold the light higher."

The colonel swung the lantern so its rays flashed full in the direction indicated.

Sir James took a few steps forward, stared, placed his hand dazedly to his forehead and almost reeled backwards against his companion.

"Quick—" he gasped, clutching at his throat like a man strangling. "For God's sake, let us get out of here."

The colonel hurried him forth into the outer air. "What was it? What did you see? Are you hurt?" he asked. The bruskness of his words attested his own agitation.

But the baronet only motioned him to close and lock the door. Horror and bewilderment gripped Sir James. His face was ghastly. He tried to speak; only four words escaped him.

"The—coffin—is—empty!"

The colonel whirled about and turned his piercing eyes upon his companion. For a few seconds he stood there, motionless; amaze-

ment, incredulity written on his countenance.

"Are you sure?" he asked at length. "Was it open?"

The baronet could only voice an inarticulate sound. He was incapable of speech. He stumbled, rather than walked as the two hurried from the place. Neither spoke. Overhead the lightning flashed more frequently, the thunder rumbled at intervals in the distance, and above all the myriad soundless sounds of that frightful night came the prolonged, mournful, blood-curdling howl of a dog.

CHAPTER TEN

A QUESTION OF VAMPIRES

DO THE DEAD ARISE?

The dismal howling continued. The sound came from the direction of Balfour House.

All the way home, after their frightful experience in the mausoleum, Sir James and his guest found their steps accompanied by those anguished wails of a creature in awful woe. There was no diminution, no cessation.

Even the doughty colonel was forced to admit that cold chills ran down his spine.

As for Sir James, whatever fortitude he had once possessed now deserted him. For the time being, he was abject, trembling, cowering; completely unnerved by the successive shocks he had experienced in such a brief space of time.

"Where the devil is that cur?" growled the colonel once, when the beastly lamentation reached a high pitch. "If I knew, I'd go and shoot it."

"There is no dog in the neighborhood that I know of," returned the baronet, feebly. "We

are almost home, now. We will turn in at the next gate."

Hibbs was up, waiting for their return. He met them at the door. His eyes were shining behind his dark-rimmed spectacles. His face was flushed. His voice and manner betokened unrest and grave anxiety. He had been reading the book which Colonel Yates had handed to him a few hours previous. It now lay open on a table. At the top of the uppermost page was the heading: "History and Manifestation of Invisible Beings."

Colonel Yates pulled off his cap and mopped the perspiration from his face. "Well, thank God, we're back again, safe and sound," he ejaculated. "By jove, what a night! What a night!"

The baronet sank, weakly, upon a couch. "Wine, Hibbs—a glass of wine," he ordered. "For Colonel Yates, too."

"I'll take whiskey and soda," boomed the colonel. "In fact, I don't believe I even want the soda. I'll take the whiskey straight."

After they had been served, Hibbs heard the story of their adventure. As they talked, his eyes grew wide with excitement.

"It is very odd," he remarked, speaking so rapidly that the words seemed to trip and fall from his lips, "that while you were away I was reading along that very line. Reputable doctors of science and philosophy assert that men who have died violent deaths do, actually, leave their graves at night to become vampyrs.

In appearance they are said to be somewhat like bats. They rush upon people and suck their blood."

The colonel chuckled. Stimulated by the brandy and soda, he was inclined to be jocular. "Perhaps that was one that flew in our faces to-night, eh, Sir James?"

The baronet shuddered. "I don't like to think of it," he averred.

"Oh, but it might have been," declared Hibbs, turning hastily toward the book and beginning to turn the pages over and over. "There is something here also that tells about their ability to take possession of an individual and control that person's actions to a large degree."

"Do you believe that, Mr. Hibbs?" asked the colonel. He had taken his pipe from his pocket and was now busy filling it with tobacco.

"My own modest researches would hardly permit me to dispute such unquestionable authorities as I have just quoted," returned Hibbs, pompously. "I am forced to accept the result of their investigations, therefore I must believe their statements."

"Humph!" ejaculated the colonel. He leaned back in his chair and sent several smoke rings into he air, then watched them thoughtfully. There was no incredulity in his attitude; it was merely speculative.

Sir James was sitting in a crumpled heap on the sofa, his brow furrowed with lines, his fingers nervously intertwined. He became in-

creasingly agitated as the purport of his secretary's words impressed him.

"Roger Balfour died a suicide," he declared with sudden vehemence, his naturally thin voice sounding sharp and rasping. "Everything was undisturbed the—the last time I visited the vault."

"When was that?" asked the colonel, turning his eyes full upon the speaker. The baronet did not meet their gaze. Although he answered the question, he seemed almost oblivious of the colonel's presence.

"W-wh-when Harry—was buried," he replied with a deep sigh. "Why—why should Roger—wait—until now—to come back?"

He spoke in the wearied, exhausted manner of a person weakened by illness; his question was directed more to himself than to the two men with him.

Hibbs attempted to reply. "Perhaps—" he commenced, but the colonel interrupted.

"Harry was murdered, wasn't he? There was no clew to the assassin. No one knows his identity but Harry Balfour, himself. Very good. But the saying that dead men tell no tales applies only to the living. What they may tell to other dead men is a question for Mr. Hibbs' doctors of philosophy to answer. It is beyond me. But I venture the opinion that if the young man met his father in a realm of the fourth dimension he would very likely tell him the name of his murderer."

"Medieval—medieval," muttered Sir James,

staring dully at the rug under his feet. "Who knows what to believe about anything? I've had enough of this. I'm going to bed. And I wish to sleep late," he added, turning to Hibbs.

"Yes, Sir James, certainly. I will see that you are not disturbed," Hibbs made haste to assure him. Then, noting that the baronet had relapsed again into contemplation of the rug, he turned quickly to Colonel Yates.

"I understand what you mean, sir," he said, and there was almost a challenge in the tone. "Your idea is that Roger Balfour could not rest comfortably in his grave after his son—"

—He paused abruptly and made no attempt to complete the sentence. "In other words," he commenced again, "you think he is actuated by revenge and now here to seek out his enemies."

The colonel eyed him coldly. "Is that a question or a statement, Mr. Hibbs?" he asked.

"Both."

"Then I will answer it in the same way. You believe in the resurrection of the dead, don't you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"When?"

"I—I don't know."

"Neither do I—nor does anyone else. But there are many instances of the workings of sympathies uncontrolled by time and space. If a living man walks in his sleep he is called a somnambulist. If death frees a man from human limitations then may not those who sleep in death rise when they will and walk

where they desire without human interference? Could you imagine a father sleeping peacefully, living or dead, knowing that harm had come to his children? Think it over, Mr. Hibbs. I'll hear your views after luncheon. Until then I shall follow Sir James' suggestion and remain in bed. By gad, it's almost dawn. Can I assist you, Sir James?" He rose abruptly and turned toward his host.

The baronet gave a sudden start. "Eh, what?" he exclaimed, struggling to his feet. "Assist me? No, no, thank you. Hibbs will do anything I require. I fancy you also are quite fatigued. We had better be going up. Things may look different in the light of day."

"I dare say they will," returned the colonel as they mounted the stairs together. "Meanwhile our friend Hibbs, here, will keep watch and ward, and inform us of any new developments, eh, Hibbs?"

It was an effort to throw off the depressing and demoralizing effects of the night. But the light remark only served to focus Hibbs' mind upon a bit of news he had neglected to impart. He hastened to make amends for his forgetfulness.

"I am sorry, Sir James," he remarked hastily, as they reached the baronet's rooms and the colonel was about to say good night, "but in my interest in what you and Colonel Yates had experienced I quite omitted to mention that three very extraordinary people arrived, shortly after midnight, at Balfour House.

Some of the servants, returning from town, chanced to see them. They were received by a bent old party wearing a long coat and high beaver hat, and a woman quite unearthly in appearance, with tremendous eyes and apparently without arms."

"Without arms!" exclaimed the baronet and his guest simultaneously, the former looking suddenly old and haggard by the dim night-light.

"So I was told, sir," Hibbs went on, nervously. "When she moved, wings—long black wings—seemed to rise and fall, in lieu of arms. The servants were very alarmed."

"I should think they would be," ejaculated the colonel in a low tone.

The baronet opened the door of his room. "That's all I want to hear just now," he muttered, feebly. "I'll have to say good night. Hibbs, see that Colonel Yates wants for nothing."

He entered his room and closed and locked the door. Hibbs, after seeing the colonel into his room, quietly removed his shoes and stole downstairs to the library.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HARROWING TALES

"MY GOD! THAT'S NOT IMAGINATION"

LUCY BALFOUR, fragile, beautiful and dreamy-eyed, was oppressed with loneliness. A grim foreboding possessed her. She sensed that something mysterious and fearful was transpiring, the nature of which she could only conjecture.

The house was strangely silent. She found herself walking softly and listening, ever listening; but for what, she could not have told. The piano failed to attract her. She touched a few notes but their sound seemed only to awaken strange echoes in a world of silence.

She sat down in the shade of the verandah and tried to read but could not concentrate her thoughts upon the printed pages of the book in her hand. Walking in the garden she was positive that several times she heard her name called very, very softly from a distance. She chided herself for her nervousness; her tendency to melancholy.

It was odd, she reflected, that ever since she had walked on the terrace with Colonel Yates,

the thought of her father had been constantly in her mind. Was there something he wanted her to do, or was he trying to warn her; or prevent her from doing that which would prove harmful? Lucy had always adored her father. She would not wish to displease him. Could it be that he did not approve of her love for Jerry Hibbs? Or did he want her to consult Sir James?

The problem troubled her. Finally she resolved to take Smithson into her confidence, and ask her advice. But when she sought her, the maid was nowhere to be found, neither in the house nor about the grounds.

It was unusual for Smithson to be absent when wanted. That fact added to Lucy's uneasiness. Restless and perplexed, she wandered aimlessly, here and there, now arranging the flowers, now straightening a picture or adjusting the draperies. But her actions were mechanical, her thoughts vague and remote. It was difficult, at times, to make herself believe that she was not walking in her sleep.

The whole day had been peculiar. Even the atmosphere was sinister. An electrical storm just about dawn had intensified, rather than dispelled, the excessive heat. Heavy, fetid odors sated the air. Birds were silent in the trees; animals stood with apathetic docility, or lay, listless and somnolent, in the grass.

Among the servants there was much idleness and talking in hushed tones of the strange events at Balfour House.

Sir James, always most methodical in his habits, remained in his room most of the day.

Colonel Yates, of whom Lucy found herself somewhat in awe, did not appear until luncheon; afterward, he had gone for a long, solitary tramp about the country-side.

Hibbs, absorbed in tremendous literary researches in the library, had apparently forgotten his sweetheart's existence.

Lucy had come upon him early that morning, fast asleep in the library, a large, uninteresting-looking volume on the floor at his feet; a tray with whiskey and a bottle of soda beside him. To her he admitted that he had not been in bed at all during the night. In consequence, he retired immediately to his room and was not seen again until after luncheon, when his secretarial duties demanded his attention. Those finished, he again immured himself in the library.

Slowly the day drew to a close. At dinner they all met for the first time. The conversation was general and trivial. By tacit understanding between the three men, no reference was made in Lucy's presence to the events of the previous night.

But later in the evening, after Lucy had gone to her room, they fell into a discussion of the same subjects which had so interested them before retiring.

It was while so engaged that a shriek, loud, piercing and terrified, smote their ears. It acted on their nerves like an edge of steel.

With one accord they sprang to their feet.

"My God! What was that?" exclaimed the colonel.

"A scream—a woman's scream—" gibbered Hibbs, his face as white as death.

"Not Lucy. That wasn't Lucy's voice, was it?" Sir James felt his knees shaking under him. He clutched the table for support.

But the colonel was already running toward the hall, Hibbs close at his heels. Sir James steadied himself and followed as fast as his wildly beating heart would permit. As they reached the foot of the stairs another cry resounded. Not so wild and penetrating but more tremulous, hysterical, sobbing.

Sir James and Hibbs exchanged glances. "From her room!" they gasped, simultaneously.

Hibbs took the stairs in bounds. The colonel and Sir James were almost as quick. But when they reached the upper hall the younger man had already tried the door. It was locked.

"Lucy! Lucy!" he called, forgetful, in his excitement, that in the presence of others he always addressed her as Miss Balfour. "What's the trouble? Are you hurt?"

The hysterical sobbing continued. The thoroughly alarmed men stared helplessly at the locked door.

"Lucy, open the door," begged Hibbs.

"Break it open," ordered Sir James.

Even before he spoke, Colonel Yates had his shoulder against the panel and was endeavor-

ing to force the lock. Hibbs sprang to assist. Under their combined strength the door gave slightly. Before they could make a more vigorous and sustained effort the key turned in the lock and the door was flung open from the inside. Simultaneously, the person who turned the key sprang back and to one side. As the three men dashed into the room it appeared at first sight to be vacant. Only a small table light was on, and it was heavily shaded.

For the barest second they stood dazed, their eyes roving here and there about the room, prepared to behold, they knew not what horror.

Then, from out the shadow behind the door where she had so hastily drawn herself as she opened it, came Smithson. Her eyes were wild with terror. Her teeth were chattering like castanets. She was trembling, sobbing and clasping her apron hysterically between her hands.

A volley of questions assailed her.

"Smithson! Was that you? What do you mean by screaming like that? Where's your mistress?"

"Good heavens, woman! What's the matter? Can't you speak?"

"What was it? A burglar?"

The maid choked back her sobs and shook her head to the last question put by Hibbs.

"She's—she's in there. I locked her in there—in the dressing room," she explained brokenly, replying to Sir James, who had been the

first to address her. She pointed, tragically, to an inner door, also closed.

"Who—Miss Lucy?" stormed the colonel. "Why did you lock her in there? Has anything happened to her? Is she hurt?"

"Oh-oh-oh, I hope not," sobbed the woman. "I don't know. If it could come in here it might have gone in there—I don't know. Oh, I never saw anything so dreadful in all my life."

"Here I am, Sir James. I'm all right. What happened? Is Smithson hurt? Please, somebody, open the door."

It was Lucy's voice. Both Sir James and Hibbs sprang to the dressing room door to release her. As she emerged, frightened and trembling, Sir James placed a protecting arm about her and led her over to a chair by the window.

"It's all right," he assured her. "There is no one hurt. Smithson was frightened, that's all. She gave us all quite a start, you know."

Smithson, however, had calmed somewhat under the colonel's scrutiny and now sank down into a chair. Involuntarily she raised one hand to her neck, only to draw it away with an exclamation of dismay.

The colonel's quick eyes followed her movements. He gave one quick glance at her neck and instantly summoned Sir James and Hibbs to inspect it with him.

"Those are wounds," he exclaimed, pointing to two small marks on the woman's throat.

"Something has hurt her. Look! They are bleeding, slightly. What was it—a bite or a stab wound? For heaven's sake get yourself together and tell us what happened," he finished, impatiently, to the quaking Smithson. "Looks devilish queer to me," he added to Sir James. "I never saw anything like it, did you?"

Hibbs and the baronet both paled perceptibly.

"Aren't they the same—" commenced Hibbs and stopped short, with a meaning glance toward Lucy, sitting motionless by the window, her eyes riveted upon something she was watching on the lawn without.

The baronet inclined his head.

"Well?" queried the colonel, not understanding their pantomime. Sir James moistened his lips and spoke in a whisper.

"They are similar to those found on—on the neck of Harry Balfour," he said.

Smithson gave a little cry of horror.

" 'Sh!" warned Hibbs. "Don't let Miss Balfour see your neck. Cover it up, quick."

The maid obeyed, placing her handkerchief over the small crimson spots and prepared to tell her story.

"It was like this," she commenced. "Miss Lucy was getting ready for bed. I started for the linen closet to get towels. As I came to the turn in the hall I saw someone—a man—walking slowly toward me. Oh, my heavens! Will I ever forget that moment? As I live, it was

the old man from Balfour House—the one Thomas and I saw with the woman—the man with the beaver hat. He was all stooped and grinning—and his hand was like a skeleton's where he held his cloak around him. And he kept coming—and coming—right straight toward me. I wanted to scream and I couldn't. Something seemed to hold me tight by the throat. I just turned and ran—Oh, it seemed that I would never get back to this room.'' She paused and rocked to and fro, her eyes dilated with horror at the recollection.

''Yes, yes; go on,'' encouraged Hibbs, who had been listening eagerly to every word, like a scientist striving to analyze some baffling psychic phenomena. ''Then what?''

''Oh, I thought of Miss Lucy. I did not want to frighten her. I just dashed in here and pushed her into the dressing room. She was standing there, right by the open door. And I turned the key so she could not come back in here. Then I ran back to this door to lock it—and just then he reached it, too. Oh, it was awful—awful!''

''Do you mean to say he came in here?'' cried Sir James in a horrified tone.

Smithson shook her head. ''Not—not through the door,'' she faltered. ''I managed to get it locked. I thought we were safe. But almost at once I saw something coming through the key-hole. Something like smoke or steam. It poured through steadily and didn't die away, or anything. It just stayed together in a whit-

ish mass. I was too terrified to move, sir. I just stood there looking at it."

"And the man—what about him? Was he outside all this time?" The colonel asked the question.

"It wasn't a long time, sir," returned the maid. "It was all in a minute. Right after I locked the door. The vapor came in fast and formed, right there, in the shape of a man." She pointed toward a rug in front of the door by which they had entered. "Then all of a sudden the vapor melted away, and instead of it there stood the old man, just as I had seen him in the hall. He kept grinning and showing all his teeth as he came toward me. I couldn't scream. Lord knows I tried to. And then, when I couldn't back away from him any further he grasped me in his awful hands and put his face down closer, and closer to mine until I could feel his teeth right against me. I guess that's when I screamed. I don't know. I must have fainted. When I opened my eyes again he was gone and I could hear you talking about breaking down the door."

The woman closed her eyes and sank back in her chair, evidently exhausted.

Lucy, who had been listening intently to every word, had, strangely enough, remained in her seat by the window, not once turning her gaze in the direction of the speaker. Instead, she continued to look steadily out of the window into the dark shadows of the lawn.

As Smithson finished her narrative the colo-

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *London After Midnight.*

THE REAL ESTATE TRANSACTION IN THE GARDEN.

nel glanced across at Sir James and shook his head.

"Great imagination," he observed. "Has she ever shown such symptoms before?"

The baronet was staring fixedly at the handkerchief covering Anna Smithson's discolored throat. Through it a tiny crimson spot was visible.

"How do you account for that?" he asked, his voice almost a whisper. "I don't like it—I don't like it."

Lucy sprang to her feet.

"Oh, come quick—come quick—" she cried, pointing in great excitement out on the lawn. "There he goes—there he goes, now—the man in the beaver hat. He was hiding behind the rhododendron. I was watching. I couldn't see him clearly before. Look—he is dodging between the bushes. Do you see him?"

She need not have asked the question. They saw the man clearly enough—far too clearly for their peace of mind. He was skulking among the shrubbery, making his way in the direction of Balfour House. For an instant they stood there, grouped in the window, watching his grotesque, gnome-like movements. Even as they looked, he disappeared from view as mysteriously as if the ground had opened and engulfed him in its depths.

Sir James clutched the colonel's arm. "My God! That is not imagination," he exclaimed. "This time we all saw him."

The colonel nodded, gravely. "Come with

me," he whispered. "Mr. Hibbs will look after Miss Balfour." Then, turning to Hibbs, "I would advise you to close and lock that window, Mr. Hibbs. And see that Miss Balfour is not left alone. Sir James and I will investigate this matter."

CHAPTER TWELVE

PANIC

"HARK! THERE IT GOES, AGAIN"

HIBBS, left to protect Lucy, lost not a moment in securing the casement. Despite the excessive heat, he drew the curtains tightly. He was far more nervous and excited than she.

"Anything is preferable to a return of such a creature as Smithson was unfortunate enough to encounter," he observed, when Lucy reminded him that he was excluding what little breeze might be stirring on such a hot night.

"Oh, my goodness, yes," supplemented the maid. "If you had only seen him, Miss Lucy, though I must say I'm glad for your sake you didn't. I'm sure you'd have died. I'm twice as strong as you, and even my poor heart is still pounding."

She clutched her side and rolled her eyes in an effort to portray the extremity of her sufferings.

Lucy went over to her and patted her sympathetically. "Poor, dear Smithson!" she exclaimed. "You were perfectly wonderful!

And so brave! Wasn't she, Jer—I mean, Mr. Hibbs?"

"'Pon my honor, she was," agreed their protector, striding about the room, looking everywhere for some trace of the mysterious, vaporous visitor. "She certainly did her duty."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Hibbs," interposed the maid, her large, gray eyes gleaming with gratitude or—was it something else? Hibbs could not decide. Whatever it was, it made him uncomfortable. He began to think how to get her away.

Lucy was enthusiastic. "Imagine poor Smithson, in all her terror, never trying to save herself by running down stairs, but thinking only of me," she went on, eagerly. "When she dashed into the room and pushed me into the dressing-room, I was simply paralyzed. I thought she had gone mad. And when she commenced to scream, I was too terrified to speak or move. I know that I would never have been so heroic."

"I'm sure you would, Miss Lucy," returned Smithson. "I don't believe you would have fainted, like I did."

It was then that Hibbs had his brilliant idea. "Ah, I say," he exclaimed, "I think Smithson could jolly well do with a cup of tea, don't you know."

Smithson's large eyes looked again at the young secretary with that peculiar light which he had so often noticed. It was only for the barest fraction of a second, for at the same

time, her gaze included Lucy. It was almost as if she read, telepathically, the thoughts in both their minds. They wanted to be alone.

"Tea," she repeated, eagerly. "Now that is kind of you, Mr. Hibbs, to suggest it. I really believe it would do me good. If Miss Lucy does not need me, I'll go right down and make some."

Lucy glanced shyly toward her lover. "Oh, I will not need you, Smithson," she made haste to say. "But—but will you not be afraid to go alone through the hallway?"

The maid was already hurrying toward the door. "Not if I go down while Sir James and Colonel Yates are about," she replied, quickly. "They are still there. I can hear their voices."

She was quite right in her surmise. Sir James and the colonel had paused at the head of the stairs for a brief conversation. The colonel suggested that it would be wise for them to reconnoitre, following the direction taken by the terrifying old man, and gain, if possible, a surreptitious view of the strange occupants of Balfour House.

The baronet, relying upon the judgment of his more experienced military companion, reluctantly consented.

As they descended the stairs together, the colonel glanced back and upward. His gaze encountered that of Anna Smithson. She was standing in the upper hall, looking down upon them, over the banister. She turned, instantly, and hurried off toward the servants' wing.

There the servants were assembled, even to the housekeeper, awaiting enlightenment as to the cause of the screams they had heard.

Some had been aroused from sleep. Others were up, in varying stages of negligee, trying to keep cool on a hot summer's night. All had been startled and alarmed by the screams. The butler had started to investigate. When he entered the hall, he said, the three gentlemen were just disappearing into Miss Lucy's rooms. Naturally, he had returned to await a summons. When none came he, as well as the other servants, became increasingly disturbed. They were just discussing the possibility of wholesale murder having been committed when the door opened and Smithson entered.

Sighing, trembling and pointing dramatically to her throat, she collapsed weakly into a chair. Had those present seen her vigorous approach through the hall they might have marveled at the sudden extreme prostration of the woman.

A barrage of questions assailed her.

"Please give me a cup of tea," she begged, then corrected herself. "No, I think I could do with something a little more strengthening. Billings, couldn't you make out to give me a little drop of spirits? I've got to collect my nerves, you know. I've been face to face with death—actual death."

She lay back in her chair, weak and faint, and looked upon the butler with a gaze so eloquent and pleading that the poor man did not have it in his heart to refuse. At his word

underlings ran to serve her. Someone brought ice for her head, another a lotion for her wounded neck. But Billings, himself, served the stimulant which enabled her to sit up in her chair and tell the tragic story.

"It was like meeting the devil," she told the awed and trembling group that clustered about her. "I was all alone in the hall. It was dark, back by the linen closet. I thought once I heard something. But I couldn't see anything. Then, when I was about to turn—"

She paused and looked around with apprehension. "Hark! What was that?" she asked.

No one had heard a sound. They all listened. Silence.

"I guess I only imagined it," Anna Smithson said, wearily, as she resumed her narrative.

The maids drew closer together. They shivered despite the height of the mercury in the thermometer.

"Where was I?—Oh, yes, at the turn," resumed Smithson. "I was right there, when suddenly, from out the darkness, and coming straight toward me was—" She shivered and rolled her eyes at the recollection.

"Yes, yes, dearie. What kind of a figure?" begged the housekeeper in quavering tones. "Jennie, stop making that noise with your foot. It is disturbing." This to one of the maids who was nervously scraping the toe of one shoe against the other.

Jennie desisted and Anna talked on. Her elocutionary powers were considerably better

than the average. Her voice flowed musically, now trembling and agitated, now low and tense, as if the speaker were keenly aware of each dramatic point and determined to emphasize it to the utmost. Her small audience was thrilled.

"I couldn't make it out at first," she replied to the housekeeper's question. "Then, as I saw it wasn't Billings or Bennett, I realized, all at once, that it was—"

Again she stopped abruptly and held up one finger for silence. "'Sh! There it goes, again," she whispered.

"What? I don't hear nothink," whispered one.

"Oh, my Gawd! I'm going to give notice," muttered another. "I can't stand this. If anythink more 'appens I'll scream, right 'ere."

"What did you think you 'eard, dearie? 'Ere, take another sip of this." The housekeeper leaned over the heroine and pressed refreshment to her lips.

"I don't know. Footsteps, I guess," faltered Smithson, after she had swallowed the sip as requested. "I'll be hearing them in my sleep, from now on."

"But who was the bloomin' geezer?" queried one of the men. "'Ow'd he get up there and 'ow'd he get away?"

"It was,"—and here Smithson sat bolt upright and held them spellbound by the fixity of her gaze,—"the old man from Balfour House! The man with the beaver hat! The man with the long cloak and the fiendish grin!"

Half a dozen voices interrupted. A girl squealed shrilly in terror. Smithson went right on.

"Something clutched at my throat. I couldn't scream. I just ran. He followed. I rushed into the room—Oh, Oh-o-o!" She finished with a hysterical cry and sprang to her feet. "There it is again," she shrieked. "That footstep! It's his, I tell you—Oh, I know it's his."

In the general confusion there were so many footsteps that no one could have identified any.

"Be quiet," ordered the butler to his panic stricken staff. " 'Ow can we 'ear when there's so much noise? Look out the door there, Gallagher. See if there's anyone prowling."

"Shure, an' it's not meself that'll be sthickin' me head into th' ould rip's tathe. Mullins kin hev th' job," retorted the man addressed.

"Don't make game!" exclaimed the groom. "S'elp me Gawd, my neck's as valible as any lumberin' Hirishman's. I ain't no bloomin' ghost fighter."

"Keep still," warned the housekeeper. "If anyone was about they'd be frightened away by now. Listen, now, while Anna tells us the rest. Go on, dearie. Nothink is going to 'urt you."

Smithson, thus calmed and admonished, permitted herself to be drawn back into her chair and again resumed her story. As she proceeded, the attention of the audience increased in intensity. The maids hardly drew breath.

Only the labored breathing of the big Yorkshireman, Thomas, puffing unconsciously in his absorption, was audible beside the low, pulsing voice of the narrator. The black cat that had been sleeping in a corner rose, stretched lazily, and strolled on velvet paws over toward the sink. It was a hot night; the animal was thirsty.

"Then, as the vapor disappeared, I could see the man plainly," Anna Smithson declared. "I kept stepping backward—he came toward me—his arms outstretched—his head thrust forward. He showed his teeth in a smile. Two horrid, grinning rows—I thought I would die—I could not scream—He grasped me and bent me backward—like this—"

She leaned back and raised her chin upward. The cat, unnoticed by the rapt listeners, was examining a row of pans under the sink. Neglected, he contemplated self-service. Anna Smithson's voice flowed on.

"—The villain leaned his face down toward mine. I could feel his hot breath coming against my cheek—I made a terrible effort and screamed—but his teeth—those horrid, yellow teeth, were even then touching—"

Crash! A tin pan fell and went rolling over the floor. Against the deathly stillness the sound was tremendous. It transformed the mute listeners into a frenzied rabble. Shriek after shriek rent the air. Chairs overturned. Glass jars on a shelf over the sink fell to the floor in fragments. More tinware clattered. A

black, feline form, leaping wildly from floor to shelf and from shelf to floor sent two maids into hysterics and the housekeeper to the floor in a dead faint. Mullins backed into the stove. His howl of rage and pain rose above the pandemonium of other sounds.

"Where's th' bloomin' ghost?" he shrieked. "Wow! Wot th' 'ell are you doin', you blarsted Hirishman? Gimme room—gimme room!"

"Shut up, ye spalpeen," bellowed Gallagher, making a wild sweep at the flying cat and shattering the only light that illumined the scene. "There ut goes—catch ut—hould ut—Oi'll wring uts ears 'round."

But in the melee that ensued the cat, that had walked by itself and precipitated the panic, was safe on the top of poor Smithson's head, holding his position against all comers.

In the front part of the house on the floor above, Lucy Balfour and her protector, Jeremiah Hibbs, listened, tense with horror and apprehension, to the shrieks and clamor emanating from below. Lucy clung to her lover. She begged him not to leave her alone. Nothing, Hibbs told her, would induce him to do so. He locked the door and drew her to the center of the room. There they stood, arms about one another, staring fixedly at the keyhole—that terrible keyhole, through which, according to Smithson, the ghost of a man had emerged but a short half hour before. Would reappear? Would they, also, experience its horrors?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE WOMAN ON THE CEILING

"VAMPYRUS SPECTRUM"

MEANWHILE Sir James Hamlin and his friend, Colonel Yates, were well on their way to investigate the weird tenants of Balfour House. It had been midnight when they set forth on this, their second nocturnal excursion. The hour was now somewhat later. They had taken a roundabout course, stopping at intervals to listen and to examine the terrain for prowlers. Though neither would admit the fact, it was clear that the possibility of a sudden encounter with the strange old creature they themselves had seen from the window did not intrigue them.

It was best, as the colonel sagely pointed out, that they observe as much as they could without being, themselves, observed. So they proceeded with caution. Not a soul was abroad. Sir James' heart raced within him. He strained his eyes and his ears for some evidence of the passage or the presence of the stooped old man in the long cloak. But no one was concealed amid the bushes, not the stealth-

iest sound of footsteps was borne to their hearing.

"On a night like this," he said in tones which, strive as he might to make them steady, were still tremulous, "the slightest sound could be heard some distance. We shall have to be very careful as we approach the house."

"Are we near it, now?"

"Rather close. I thought, a moment ago, that I saw a light flicker from one of the upper windows. I may have been mistaken. The trees obstruct one's view."

They turned a little more to the left and crossed the neglected lawn obliquely. The baronet's eyes had not deceived him. A glimmer of light did shine forth from an upper window. From where they stood they viewed it at an angle.

"We cannot see into the room from here," murmured the colonel softly, his lips close to the baronet's ear. "We will have to go around. That part of the house seems to be remote."

To Sir James that low, scarcely breathed whisper sounded loud enough to have echoed half over London. The colonel could feel the slender form of the baronet shaking under the pressure of his hand.

"It seems to be from the secret chamber," Sir James whispered in reply. "The room in which no one human has walked for years. A woman was once imprisoned there. They say she walks there still."

"Queer it should be the only room in the whole colossal pile to show signs of occupancy," mused the colonel. "We know the old man returned but a short time ago; perhaps he uses it, himself."

Sir James felt a chill close about his heart. He shrank back in appalling dread from proceeding farther. He dreaded that which he might see. He, better than this newly returned officer from India, knew the tragic history of Balfour House. Nothing but the thought of Lucy, and Lucy's possible danger, encouraged him in the distasteful undertaking upon which they were bent.

But the colonel was trained not to retreat. With confident step he led the way through a tangle of weeds, rank grass and overgrown bushes.

A short flight of stone steps, mouldy and grass-grown, led to a ledge of higher ground. The two men mounted them and crept cautiously onward to a large tree which the colonel, with unerring instinct, selected as the one from which a view of the lighted chamber might be obtained.

"Listen!" he whispered. His quick ear had caught a sound from the open window above them. Another instant and Sir James heard it, too. It was broken and irregular but distinctly audible, a low, insistent sobbing, as of a woman in despair.

"Ghost or human?" whispered the colonel.

"Ghost!" muttered Sir James, chokingly.

"I wish we had never come." What he feared, he could not have told even himself.

"Carry on, man," encouraged the colonel, for the trembling hand of Sir James fastened upon his coat sleeve in an effort to draw him back from further investigation. "Look! What's that?" He pointed upward. "In the room, there—on the ceiling!"

The clasp of the baronet's hand tightened and tightened. Like a graven image he stood, staring at the dark, slow-moving, shadowy form visible upon the ceiling of that mysterious upper room. The colonel, also, stood motionless, silent and watchful.

Weird and uncanny beyond words was the sight of that strange, hybrid shape, up there above their heads, moving always to the accompaniment of those low, moaning, shuddering sobs.

How long they stood there, mutely viewing the spectral manifestation neither man could have told. The form, now vague and indistinct, now dark and clearly visible, pervaded the room like an evil spirit. There were moments when the huge, wide-spread wings hovered, vulture-like, in mid-air. Again, the spectre drew itself into compact shape and swooped down and out of sight, only to mount upward again in a more startling evolution.

Suddenly, it turned. For the fraction of a second, they glimpsed its head in profile.

An exclamation of horror escaped Sir James. The colonel voiced an oath.

"A woman!" gasped the baronet.

The colonel nodded. "Vampyrus spectrum —Vampyrus spectrum—" he muttered, half to himself.

He grasped a low, over-hanging branch of the tree and commenced to pull himself up. "Come," he whispered. "It is not difficult. We shall be well hidden, here. Let us watch and be very silent."

He drew himself up, higher and higher, among the thick foliage. The baronet followed. They were indeed, well-concealed; but their eyes could not penetrate between the intervening branches. Sir James, who had somewhat recovered his courage, indicated a small ledge or balcony to which they could easily swing themselves from their perch in the tree. This they at once proceeded to do, dropping noiselessly upon the narrow gallery and creeping cautiously along its length until they obtained an unobstructed view of the room it skirted.

They looked, and the colonel's hand fell softly upon the baronet's shoulder, warning him to silence. There was need of such warning, for the sight which met their eyes was one that Sir James Hamlin could hardly have been expected to look upon without emotion.

"My God! Roger!" he murmured, feeling so weak and ill for the moment that it was only by great effort he maintained his position on the ledge.

"Where? The one in the center?" whispered the colonel, pointing to where sat a tall,

dignified man in an arm chair, directly facing the weird old man they had seen leaving the grounds of the Hamlin estate. Near the latter was a third man, younger and, like the others, of a ghastly pallor. They were not conversing but sitting, silent and ghastly, absorbed in contemplation of the antics of a gigantic bat—or was it a woman?

If a woman, why was she in the form of a bat? If a bat, why had it the face of a woman? A face beautiful if flushed with the glow of health; but with the pallor of the grave upon it, a face of such sinister loveliness that the large, dark rimmed, deep set eyes seemed baleful and inhuman. It was a countenance of singular immobility but both men could not fail to observe the strong, white, even teeth of the creature that gleamed and glistened when the lips parted, though not in any semblance of a smile.

The room in which this astonishing scene was witnessed was well-nigh beyond description. At some period the furniture had been covered over, evidently by servants fearful and in great haste to be finished with so unwelcome a task. Everything was hap-hazard and askew. The ceiling was tall and vaulted. The windows were shrouded in heavy curtains of dull brocade, thick with the dust of years. The furniture was meagre but massive. Tall candelabra, swathed in gossamer fabric, now fallen into shreds, flanked either side of what had formerly been a shrine. High in an alcove

on either side, chandeliers that had once glittered with lustres, were hardly visible under their mantle of dust and cobwebs. The floor was strewn, here and there, with heaps of discarded rugs, draperies and wearing apparel, as if all the belongings of the unhappy creature who had once been incarcerated there, had been ruthlessly flung within its confines and locked there, after her demise, that nothing might remain in view to remind those who survived of her former presence. No wonder the ghost of the poor creature walked and sobbed amid that scene of desolation! Or did she walk? The question came, unbidden, to the minds of the two watchers at the window.

Whatever means of locomotion the bat-woman possessed, she remained, for the time being, quiescent. Apart from the others, in the most gloom-filled corner of the room, she —or it—hung suspended, as it were, some distance above the floor, apparently in repose. But the dark-bright, solemn eyes were wide-open; staring, coldly, steadily towards the window.

Involuntarily the two watchers drew back into the shadow. Was it possible, the colonel whispered to Sir James, that this uncouth grotesquerie with the inexpressibly mournful face and hungry, watchful eyes, could really be the physical personification of that blood-sucking ghost known as the Vampyr by some, and by others as the Vukodlak and the Murony?

With an inward warning of danger, the baronet recoiled impulsively. He felt his blood curdling in his veins, his brain reeling at the thought. His right hand reached for the revolver he had placed in his pocket before starting. The colonel made a move to restrain him but it was unnecessary. The pocket was empty!

"Now where—" commenced Sir James, perplexity and consternation mingling in his tone, but another warning grip upon his arm restrained him. It was well, for he was fast losing control of his nerves and reasoning faculties.

The man he had designated as Roger Balfour, sitting with his back to the window where they were secreted, seemed to be listening intently. He inclined his head slightly; then, as if sensing the presence of intruders, turned to face them. The extreme pallor of his visage was indescribable. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes keen, questioning, reproachful. And at the left temple was an open wound; small, round, discolored, such as would be caused by a bullet.

This frightful apparition riveted Sir James to the spot. He could neither move nor speak. Like a creature fascinated by the malignant gaze of a serpent, the baronet crouched, helpless, incapable of thought or action. The colonel, whose protecting clutch upon his arm had never ceased, drew him quickly back from view, and along the balcony to a point from

which they could safely make their descent.

"Guess we've seen all we want to," he whispered, hoarsely, as they reached the ground.

Sir James, now spurred to action, was in a fever of haste to get away from the locality.

"No mistake," he muttered, again and again. "No mistake. It's Roger. Lucy's father. Not dead! Not dead! But he was shot—I tell you, he was shot—five years ago. Did you—did you see the bullet wound in his temple?"

The poor man was almost hysterical. And transcending all the other disquieting sensations with which he was beset, came the memory of that fearsome, bodiless shadow of the bat-woman—or was it the Vampyrus spectrum?—that without doubt menaced the happiness, even the life, of Lucy!

"I can't stand this sort of thing, colonel," he groaned as they hurried as fast as his weak and trembling frame would permit, back toward his own home. "It's more than human nature can endure. I'm already a broken man. Something must be done—and quickly. God knows what has happened to Lucy while we have been away."

So that was it, reflected the colonel. Lucy! Sir James was in love with Lucy! He had mistrusted it all along. Now he felt certain that the baronet's affection for the young woman who had been his ward since her girlhood was more than that of a foster father for his daughter. And Lucy, the colonel was con-

vinced, was in love with the baronet's secretary, Jerry Hibbs! What complications would yet ensue? What tragedies would follow? But aloud, he only permitted himself to say that he was baffled, astounded by all that had occurred so swiftly within the short space of time since he had been the baronet's guest.

"It is a serious case," he observed, thoughtfully. "I fully appreciate the position in which you find yourself, Sir James. But as far as I can see now, there is nothing you can do for the present. My advice would be to take every precaution, and await developments."

They had reached a slight elevation from which, upon looking back, they could dimly discern the gleam of light from that shutterless, upper window—that weird, peculiar light that, so far as they had been able to detect, emanated from no lighting device of any kind within the room.

And as they looked, a form was outlined in the window, and from across the distance they had already come sounded a voice, low, plaintive, seductive on the still night air, as it called, once, twice, thrice:

"Lucy—Lucy—Lucy—"

"They've come for her!" gasped the baronet, and crumpled in a dead faint at the colonel's feet.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BY THE LIGHT OF DAY

"THE ROOM WHERE I SAW HIM LAST"

The night was far spent when Colonel Yates carried the unconscious form of Sir James into his home and placed it upon a couch. After applying restoratives, he was much relieved when the baronet came out of the faint without suffering any serious result.

But they were both surprised and alarmed to discover that no attempt had been made by the servants or anyone in the house to close and lock it for the night. Windows were open, doors unlocked, lights turned on. There was no evidence, however, that any stranger had entered, or that anything had been disturbed.

Acting upon the colonel's advice, the baronet did not ring for his man, but permitted the colonel to assist him to his room. Nearing the upper landing they heard several voices in conversation. As they turned down the hall, the door of Lucy's suite suddenly opened and Anna Smithson came out. At sight of them, she turned.

"Here they are now, Miss Lucy," she called,

reassuringly. "Mr. Hibbs will not need to sit up with us any longer. The danger is all past, isn't it, sir?" she inquired, addressing Colonel Yates who, alone of the two, bore himself in a manner to inspire confidence.

"Oh, is Miss Lucy still up?" he returned, quickly. "I am indeed sorry that she should have had her rest so interfered with."

"Between you and Hibbs I should think you might have looked after her safety and at the same time permitted her to retire," complained the baronet, querulously. "Where is he— Where's Hibbs? Send him to me."

"Yes, sir," rejoined the woman, "but Miss Lucy did not wish to retire until you had returned, sir. I went to make some tea, and the servants had a little fright, sir. Nothing serious; just an accident. One of the maids was nervous and the housekeeper had a spell, so I told Billings I would close and lock the house, sir. And when I got back to Miss Lucy's rooms she and Mr. Hibbs thought I was the old man, coming back. We were just getting it all explained, sir."

It was a voluble explanation addressed to Sir James, but the woman's eyes were directed toward Colonel Yates. He seemed to find her words of considerable interest. As she finished, he inclined his head as if in approval.

"Well, everything is over for to-night, I think," he remarked, gravely. "You can tell your mistress, from me, that all ghosts, goblins, demons and vampyrs retreat at the first

faint streaks of dawn. She may go to sleep, now, without the slightest fear of having her rest disturbed—and so may you."

"Thank you, sir," returned the maid, curtseying. Behind her, Hibbs hurried forward through the half-open door.

"Aha!" exclaimed the colonel. "Here comes our young protector. It was very wise of you, Mr. Hibbs," he continued, seriously and in a lower tone after Smithson had passed out of hearing, "to not leave the young lady alone. Sir James and I have witnessed strange things to-night. Things which no one, save those who have seen, would ever believe."

The baronet, who had preceded them as far as the door of his room, now turned, fretfully, to demand Hibbs' services and to say good night to the colonel.

"I don't expect to sleep any," he told them. "But I must try, at least, to rest and collect my thoughts. At luncheon, Colonel Yates, I will see you and we will consider what is best to do."

The mental strain under which he was laboring caused his voice to quaver like that of an aged man. He swayed, dizzily, as he turned, and had to grasp his secretary's arm for support when they entered the room.

And for hours, after dismissing Hibbs, he lay on his bed, watching the gray, misty dawn transformed to roseate hues, and finally into the full light of day, trying to make himself be-

lieve that all the harrowing experiences through which he had just passed were but the illusions of a dream. Everything had come upon him so swiftly, so overwhelmingly sudden! There had been no opportunity for preparation, no moment in which to steel himself against the onslaught of the intangible powers which he felt were slowly surrounding and hemming him in on every side. There must be some means of defense; some way of warding off the evil threatened.

But what was that evil? Who—what—were these people—these creatures in Balfour House? What were they there for? Why should they beset him—and Lucy? At one moment he chided himself for his weakness in giving credence to the new and astounding thoughts which their presence there had evoked. The next instant he was forced to admit that no other solution was possible.

By noon, however, he had fully decided upon a line of action which, while it might be fraught with danger, would at least permit him to convince himself, once and for all, that Balfour House actually sheltered the strange beings he had beheld there in the still watches of the night. He would visit the place by daylight. As landlord of the premises it was his privilege to inspect it. He would see and talk to this man who wrote in Roger Balfour's hand; who, in every respect, seemed to be Roger Balfour and who, to all appearances, had aligned

himself with other restless spirits for the purpose of—what? Harming Lucy? Impossible. Lucy was his idol. She adored him. Was it to warn her? Warn her of what? Save her from danger, or unhappiness? What danger, what unhappiness threatened?

Lucy had always been guarded and protected ever since Sir James had known her. As a child he had loved her dearly. He had never ceased to love her. Was it possible that her father had returned in the flesh to lure her away from him? The little baronet shivered at the thought. How, he asked himself, could he or his agents prevail against the powers that defied death and to whom barred doors were as naught?

He was thinking along this line when Lucy met him and begged for details regarding his endeavors, the previous night, to follow the old man they had all seen darting in and out among the shrubbery on the lawn.

He could not tell her. She must never know, he decided. The shock would be enough to drive her mad. Now, she was inclined to view the situation lightly. Smithson's story of the old man she believed, because she had seen him—and the marks upon the woman's neck. But she had not seen the vapor coming through the keyhole and, on that point, was plainly skeptical.

Better, Sir James reasoned, let her remain in such a happy frame of mind than distress her by a recital of the facts as he knew them.

There were other reasons why he did not want her to know, but he did not care to linger upon their contemplation, so brushed them aside.

Their efforts to trail the old prowler had not been successful, he told her. The old man had eluded them, and they had had their long walk for nothing.

"No wonder you look so tired and ill, to-day," she observed, eyeing him closely. "I don't believe you had a bit of sleep last night, now did you?"

The baronet reluctantly admitted that he had not. Never, he thought, had he seen her look more lovely than at that moment when she stood, peering into his face, commenting upon its too troubled expression and gently chiding him for neglecting his proper rest.

"You have always been so like a father to me," she said, demurely, "that now it is my turn, and I must be a mother to you. If you do not take better care of yourself I will punish you by taking away your dessert at dinner. Now will you be good?"

The baronet promised. He took her pink cheeks between his hands and pressed a kiss upon the pouting red lips. There was much in his heart that he wanted to say, but this, he realized, was neither the time nor place to say it.

Instead, he sought Hibbs in the library and together they read everything they could find which had bearing upon vampyrs, bats and the

supernatural manifestations of disembodied spirits.

"Before another night comes," he instructed Hobbs, "some way must be devised for protecting Lucy from any such visitant as that of last night. The colonel and I are now going to Balfour House. If we are not back in an hour a searching party must come for us."

Hibbs' face flushed and as quickly paled. Though he admired the baronet's courage, he dreaded the possibilities, especially after hearing about the bat-woman and her weird companions in the secret chamber. But he accompanied Sir James and his guest to the gate, and watched them until they disappeared from sight around a bend in the road.

It was a hot, quite cloudless day. Approaching Balfour House by the main avenue the two men paused at the massive iron gates, one of which was ajar. Beyond, the great house loomed majestically, though with no sign of life about. But the sun was shining, and the panes of glass glistened like diamonds, here and there, where its rays penetrated through the ivy foliage which so framed the structure. Birds were singing, insects humming. Everything appeared peaceful and normal.

Gazing upon the pleasant scene Sir James' excitement died away and he felt ashamed that he had given way to such a display of weakness on the previous evening. Was it possible, he asked the colonel, that the entire tableau they

had looked upon in that grim, upper room, was but a figment of their imaginations?

"Never," returned the colonel, with conviction. "What we saw, was genuine, but I would not presume to declare that the figures we saw were of anything more substantial in substance than the shadow we saw on the ceiling."

The baronet sighed. He had hoped for a more encouraging reply.

They pushed the gate open, entered and made their way up the broad, curving walk, now narrowed by encroaching undergrowth, to the great, iron-studded doors that had once opened to admit stalwart knights in coats of mail. The crash of the heavy, rust-encrusted knocker, as the colonel let it fall from his hand, startled them both by the sonorous din it created on the all too silent air. Again and again it reverberated through the sepulchral mansion. There was no response. Whoever had leased the place was certainly not about at the moment, or else had no intention of admitting visitors.

Sir James looked dubious. "I would have been better pleased," he said, "if someone had admitted us. By entering forcefully there is no knowing what awaits us."

"That is true," observed the colonel, "but I have my revolver and you have yours, have you not? I thought I saw it on your desk this morning."

"Yes," returned Sir James. "I cannot understand how I came to overlook it last

night. I was sure I placed it in my pocket just before we left the house, yet when I reached for it, up there on that balcony, my pocket was empty. This morning I, too, saw it on my desk, where I must have left it. I am not usually so forgetful."

"Well, let's hope we do not have to use them," the colonel remarked, as they both drew their weapons and entered the house by means of the baronet's duplicate key.

Coming into the darkened hall from the bright sunlight without, the two men stood for a moment until their eyes became accustomed to the change. Slowly the colonel closed the great door behind them, then started, revolver in hand, to investigate the immediate area in which they found themselves.

There appeared nothing whatever to indicate recent occupancy. No coats, hats, walking sticks; no odor of tobacco or fragrant incense. He touched his finger to table and chairs and extended it for Sir James' view.

"See," he said. "Nothing here has even been dusted. The man who signed your lease and the woman with him could hardly have walked about here, much less inhabited the place for several days without having left traces. This looks ominous."

The baronet did not answer. The chill and silence of the place, mingled with its dust and mustiness, created within him a great foreboding—a sense of evil and impending disaster. He stepped softly, stealthily, like a cat.

The creak of a board under the colonel's weight chilled him to the marrow. Looking, now this way, now that, the two proceeded up the great circular staircase to the next floor. Not a sleeping room had been occupied. Some closet doors were locked. Who knew what secrets were locked within? Neither Sir James nor the colonel made any attempt to open them. Every few moments they paused to listen. No sound came to their ears, other than their own cautious movements.

A door barred their progress further in one direction. It was heavily padlocked.

"The door leading to the secret chamber," whispered Sir James. "Observe the lock." He stared at it as if fascinated.

The colonel examined it minutely. "Sealed!" he exclaimed, at length. "Rusted! Has not been unlocked for years. Is there any other mode of ingress to that room?"

Sir James shook his head. "None," he replied.

"Well, I'm dashed! Shall we break the lock?"

"I don't think it is necessary. We can see that it has not been opened by any living creature."

"Perhaps I can pry it loose."

But the solid iron staples would not give. They resisted the strongest effort to dislodge them.

"We will take another look in at the window, when we go out," the colonel remarked

as he gave up further attempt to open the door into the stairway leading to the secret room. "We might as well give the library and dining room another inspection, too," he added after a moment's reflection. "Perhaps we may yet detect some sign of occupancy."

The awful, echoing silence of the house was becoming oppressive. As they descended to the main floor, it seemed that an unseen presence accompanied them through the upper hall and down the stairway to the library. Sir James, glancing furtively this way and that, suddenly stood motionless, his eyes riveted upon a weird sight in the farthermost corner of the darkened room. His face blanched, his jaw fell slightly and his eyes dilated in horror. He made no move to use the revolver he clutched so tightly but simply stood, staring.

The colonel, turning to see what had so attracted the baronet's attention, found himself also gazing, like one petrified, at the same object—a cluster of five bats, huddled together, clinging to the ceiling!

The baronet's lips moved as if to speak. The colonel interrupted. His own voice was hoarse and guttural.

"Don't say it, man—don't say it. I know of what you are thinking. This was the room, was it not, where Roger Balfour—" He paused, significantly.

Sir James sighed. It was more of a groan.

"Yes, this is the room—where I saw him last." He spoke like a man in a daze. "They

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *London After Midnight.*

A TENSE MOMENT FOR HIBBS, BURKE, AND SIR JAMES HAMLIN.

found him there—right there, by the table."

The colonel crossed over to the table and softly moved several chairs about. He contemplated them thoughtfully. "Poor Roger!" he mused. "I was not here when it happened. I never heard the details. I wish you would tell me something about it as we return."

Sir James led the way toward the door. His knees shook under him as he walked. He held his breath as he passed almost directly under that sinister cluster of dark-winged creatures of ill omen clinging to the ceiling.

"There is not much I can tell," he remarked, a few moments later, when they were once more without the grim portals of the estate. "I went to see Roger earlier in the evening. Roger and Lucy! They seemed very happy. That is the last time either of us ever saw him, alive." He sighed audibly.

The colonel looked at his watch. "We must be back within the hour," he observed, "or your secretary will have a searching party on our trail. Miss Balfour promised to show me about the rose garden on our return. I must not disappoint her."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TWO SUITORS

"SOMETIMES SECRETARIES TALK TOO MUCH"

"My dear, I insist it is not safe for you to ramble about the grounds alone. After what happened last night, I feel that I am not presuming when I advise you to remain on the terrace, near the house."

The words, spoken in Hibbs' most dignified tone, were received with a peal of girlish laughter. He and Lucy were on the verge of a lovers' quarrel. He had been obliged to stride swiftly to overtake her before she reached the rose garden.

"But I told you that I had an engagement to meet a gentleman," she protested. "Do you not think that he would guard me from harm?"

"Most assuredly, when he arrived. He is not here yet, and you know I brought you cushions and magazines and did everything I could to make you comfortable on the verandah. When I went indoors I thought I had never seen a sweeter picture than you made, sitting there—"

"Patiently waiting for you to cease your

ministrations," she finished, roguishly. "My dear Jerry, you are perfectly splendid and I do love you dearly. But I have something to be insistent about as well as you. I am not going to have you waiting upon me, hand and foot as you do upon Sir James. I am not an old-fashioned woman. I'm modern. Some day I think I will go in for politics. I like excitement. I want to be independent and accomplish something worth while. I'm weary of sitting around and being protected. I wish I had met that old man the other night instead of Smithson. I'd have captured him."

"Lucy!" Hibbs' eyes dilated with horror at the mere thought. He knew, of course, that she did not realize the seriousness of the situation and that Sir James did not wish her to be alarmed. But if she continued in such a rebellious mood and would not brook his lover-like authority, how, he wondered was he going to protect her without taking her into his confidence regarding the supernatural character of the Balfour House inhabitants?—And if he told her, she would be sure to investigate by herself!

The look of intense anxiety upon his round, boyish face appealed to the girl more than any argument he could have uttered. She came toward him and lifted up her face for a kiss.

"Oh, Jerry, but you are solemn," she cried. "I must not tease you. Protect me all you like, but don't, please don't make me disappoint Colonel Yates. He is such an interesting

gentleman, and I promised I would tell him about rose culture."

Jerry embraced her rapturously. "Well, I have decided upon one thing," he whispered into her shell-pink ear. "I am going to tell Sir James—"

Her hand pressed close across his mouth. "Indeed, you are not," she said. "I can see that Sir James is troubled about something in which he and Colonel Yates are interested. I do not think it would be wise to tell him just now. Please wait."

Reluctantly, Hibbs promised. They were still talking when Sir James and Colonel Yates entered the garden.

The baronet frowned. His secretary's attitude toward his ward was suggestive of the lover. "Why, that is Hibbs!" he ejaculated.

"So it is," returned the colonel. "Apparently quite an exchange of confidences." And then he observed, half to himself and apropos of nothing in particular, "Sometimes secretaries talk too much."

Sir James gave him a quick, furtive glance. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I did not quite catch that remark."

"Oh, it was nothing," the colonel replied nonchalantly. "I merely voiced the thought that sometimes secretaries talk too much."

For a moment the baronet's pale eyes looked steadily into his with an expression that savored of suspicion. He was at a loss what

construction to place upon those words. Were they accidental? Hardly. Something of which the baronet was in ignorance must have given rise to them. To what extent had the colonel conversed with Hibbs since his stay under the same roof? What was it that Hibbs could have told him that would warrant his making such a remark as had just been made? The questions crowded, one upon the other, and added to Sir James' disquietude.

"My secretary," he remarked with some severity, "is a young man of very good connections. He is the son of a college professor, now deceased, who was a cousin of Lord Lyster." Then, glancing again toward the two young people in the rose garden, so plainly oblivious of all else but themselves, he added tartly: "Of course he has no income other than what I pay him for his services. I can dispense with those any day I choose."

The colonel seemed not to have heard the remark. He had passed, and his attention was concentrated upon geometrical figures he was outlining upon the gravel with the end of his stick. When he spoke, it was upon quite another subject.

"Now, in reference to these performances at Balfour House," he said, "I would suggest drastic action. For Miss Balfour's sake, as well as your own, it will be necessary to get at the truth of the matter. It surely would be unwise to risk a repetition of last night's horrors.

It makes your own house and your own grounds unsafe. If you apply to local police, the story is apt to leak out; and the curiosity it would arouse would either precipitate harm that is now only threatened, or else lead to such unpleasant publicity as to obstruct whatever plan of action was determined upon. The only safe thing to do, as I see it, is to dictate a letter to Scotland Yard asking them to send down several men—strong, able-bodied fellows —who are not afraid of man, ghost or devil, and let them take control of the situation. Be sure to specify that the men come under cover of darkness, and let Mr. Hibbs transcribe the letter."

Again the baronet looked fixedly into the colonel's face, as if to read beyond the words just uttered. But the colonel was still intent upon the geometrical design, apparently centering all his mental energies on the solution of the problems upon which he had just volunteered advice. He was unaware of his host's scrutiny.

Sir James, however, was quick to see the wisdom of that advice. What he could not see, was the importance of laying stress upon the fact that Hibbs should indite the letter. Of course Hibbs would write it. Who otherwise? Hibbs wrote all his letters.

They walked slowly onward and, at the sound of their feet on the gravel, Hibbs glanced about and observed them. Quickly whispering a few words of explanation to

Lucy, he hurried forward, his face flushed, his manner self-conscious. Before he could speak the baronet addressed him:

"Oh, Hibbs! You out here? I wasn't expecting you. Were there not some letters you were to get off while I was absent? There is something else important I want to attend to at once. Get your book and come into the library for some dictation."

He and Hibbs started toward the house and the colonel joined Lucy, where she stood waiting for him.

"You see I am very punctual, Colonel Yates," she told him as he drew near. "I am always ready to talk about rose culture to anyone who is interested. Ever since I was a little girl I have made roses my hobby."

"A very charming one, I am sure," he replied, tucking her hand through his arm and leading her along toward a more secluded nook where there was a convenient marble bench. "From what I saw just now, I judge that someone else is fond of roses, too."

" 'Sh!" she whispered, putting her finger across her lips. "You must not mention it. When something is very secret, you must have eyes and see not, and ears and hear not, and a tongue and talk not."

"Ah, I see," he chuckled. "I mean I don't see. I never saw anything—but I am somewhat fearful that Sir James did."

"Oh, my! Oh, did he really? Do you think he did?" There was such genuine distress in

her tone that the colonel did his best to dispel her alarm.

"Do you think he would be very angry?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied, after a moment's reflection. "I can't quite make up my mind. Sometimes Sir James puzzles me."

"He has always been extremely thoughtful of you, has he not?"

"Oh, very." Her eyes shone with gratitude. "You know, I'm going to tell you something that I never told anybody, not even my dear brother," she continued, impulsively. "When I was a little girl I was always a bit afraid of Sir James. He used to come so often to see my father; and deep in my heart I did not like him. I don't know why. I never could explain it. He was always so good to me, too. But sometimes I have thought that my father felt just as I did; for whenever Sir James came to see him, my father nearly always put his arm about me and drew me close to his side, or else kissed me good night and sent me to bed. Isn't that strange? And just to show you how mistaken I was, when my poor father—was taken away, nobody, save him, could possibly have been as kind and good to my brother and myself as was Sir James. He did everything for us—everything. I feel that I will never be able to repay him for all his kindness and generosity. I would not grieve him for the world. Now you know why I hesitate to tell him about —about—"

"I understand," said the colonel in a low voice. "I understand everything, my dear. You think he would be grieved at losing you, and that possibly it is your duty to remain with him as would his own daughter and be a companion to him in his declining years. Very beautiful! Very idealistic! But do you think the baronet would accept such a sacrifice from you?"

Her large eyes opened wide with an expression that was almost fear as she replied quickly, "Oh, but Colonel Yates, I have never known Sir James to refuse anything from anyone in all the years I've known him. He has been served all his life, you know. He expects people to do his bidding and to comply with his wishes, always—always. That was—that was the difficulty, you know, between him and my brother. Poor dear Harry would not comply."

"H'm!" The colonel stroked his chin, reflectively. "Lucy," he said, after a moment, "you don't object to an old man like me calling you by your name, do you? I want to have a serious talk with you about something in which you will be deeply interested. Long years ago I knew your father. He never knew me, but I admired him. Since I have seen you, I regret that I am not as young a man as Hibbs. He certainly would have me for a rival."

Lucy laughed charmingly. She was beginning to like this big, stalwart man with the strong, pugnacious chin and shrewd, kindly

eyes. For a considerable time they sat there talking. From the library, Hibbs could see them through the window. Suddenly, to his utter consternation, Lucy flung her arms about the colonel's neck and kissed him. The next instant she seemed to be weeping on his shoulder.

With a muttered exclamation he half rose to his feet. The baronet's voice detained him.

"What is it— What is it?" he asked, querulously. "Sit down. I'm not finished, yet."

Hibbs resumed his task. But later, meeting Lucy in the hall, he angrily demanded an explanation of her conduct.

"I can't tell you," she replied. "Please don't ask me."

She cheered him, however, by saying that she purposed going immediately to Sir James and telling him of their engagement.

But when Lucy entered the music room she found Sir James there, slowly pacing the floor.

"I was looking for you, my dear," he remarked, as she entered. "I want to talk to you, very seriously."

She started back in evident alarm but he reached out his arm and drew her down on the sofa beside him. "Ever since you were a little girl, Lucy," he went on, "I have admired and loved you. I noticed you talking to Hibbs out in the garden and I feared my little girl might be annoyed by the attentions of a young man in his position."

"Oh, no, Sir James," exclaimed Lucy, but

before she could say more the baronet continued speaking.

"Well, in that case, I am glad. I felt sure you would be too sensible—far too sensible—to throw your affections away upon anyone without money enough to rehabilitate the estate in which your brother was so interested. Now, for a long time I have looked forward to one day making you my wife, my dear, and—"

Lucy gave a cry of mingled surprise and terror. "Oh, Sir James—please—" she gasped, as she sprang to her feet and stood there, looking almost wildly down upon him. "I—I— Oh, I don't know what to say. I—I am— Oh, I must think— I must have time to think." Bursting into sobs, she covered her face with her hands and ran from the room.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EXORCISMS

"THEY SHALL NOT PASS THIS THRESHOLD"

A FEW hours later Colonel Yates, in the library with Sir James Hamlin, read aloud:

"A wreath of tube roses at the window, a sword across the door, will make it impossible for the Vampyr to enter a sleeping room at night."

He paused and raised questioning eyes to the baronet.

"Simple enough," Sir James murmured, plucking at his lean throat nervously. "No harm can be done by trying it. There are tube roses in the conservatory; plenty of swords in the hall."

"You do not consider it absurd, then?"

"I consider nothing absurd any more. I am prepared to accept—to believe anything." His mouth was grim, his pale eyes hard and cold. He spoke with the tenseness of a man on the verge of desperation. "If I thought," he commenced, then paused a moment in reflection. "If I thought that young upstart—"

Again he paused. This time he made no attempt to complete the sentence.

They were discussing Lucy's safety and the best means of protecting her from any insidious attack by supernatural creatures. Hibbs' entrance at the moment laden with a floral wreath and a sword evidenced that he, too, had been reading the book and had anticipated their demands.

"I thought, Sir James, you might be wanting these," he said as he presented the emblems. "If we treat the matter lightly I think Miss Balfour will readily consent to placing the wreath in her window. It is very fragrant. And after she has closed her door the sword can be fastened on the outer side without her knowledge—that is, if she should offer any objection."

"Oh, I don't think she will object," interposed the colonel. "I was talking with Miss Balfour this afternoon. She impresses me as a young woman of quite superior intelligence, eager to do anything for those she loves. She will, I am sure, appreciate your thoughtfulness."

Sir James swung about. "Whose thoughtfulness?" he asked in that thin, sharp voice of his.

"Why, yours, of course, Sir James," soothed the colonel. "Was it not you who made the suggestion?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure," agreed the baronet. But the look he cast upon his secretary was full

of suspicion, while Hibbs glowered belligerently at Colonel Yates.

A voice in the doorway caused them all to turn in that direction. "May I come in to say good night?"

It was Lucy, pale, wan and a little wistful, with great dark circles about her eyes, but smiling bravely. "I am retiring early," she explained, after apologizing for her intrusion, "because, as you know, I did not have much sleep last night."

"Quite right, my dear, quite right," exclaimed Sir James, catching up the wreath of tube roses and hurrying toward her. "I was quite concerned when you ate so little at dinner. I do not want you to be troubled by any of this nonsense that the servants are chattering about. Here is something fragrant to hang in your window. I just had it brought in from the conservatory."

Lucy gave a quick indraw of her breath as she extended her hand for the wreath. Her large eyes looked straight at the colonel. Hibbs clinched his fist.

"And what is the sword for?" she inquired with a little attempt at gaiety.

"To protect you," replied the colonel, handing the weapon to Sir James. "Mr. Hibbs, suppose you read to Miss Balfour that interesting passage which inspired Sir James to think of the wreath. It is quaint, I assure you, my dear young lady. I strongly advise you to test its efficacy."

A smile of complete confidence illumined Lucy's face. She listened attentively while Hibbs read the directions given in the old manual for the exorcism of evil spirits.

"Why, I think that idea is perfectly lovely," she exclaimed when he had finished. "Of course we will try it. Wouldn't you like to come up and put them in place with proper incantations? Smithson is there. She will be delighted."

"We are all going up now, I think," said Sir James. He placed his arm tenderly about her, despite her timid attempt to draw away from him, and assisted her up the stairs. The colonel followed. Hibbs, angry and perturbed, brought up the rear.

For a long time he had been on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Financial difficulties in his own home, over-study and a tendency to magnify all difficulties and disturbing influences, combined with the culminating tragedy of Harry Balfour's death shortly after he had accepted the position of secretary to Sir James Hamlin, had taken toll of his nervous system. His physician had strongly advised his going away for a complete rest and change of scene. That having been impossible, he had been sternly commanded to avoid excitement of any kind for a season, until his normal health was regained.

The excitement and attendant nerve strain of the several days just past had thrown him almost into a fever, though neither he,

himself, nor anyone else in the house sensed that fact. Quite unconsciously he passed his hand again and again across his forehead, as if he found it difficult to collect his thoughts.

The vision of a hideous bat-woman, coming to enfold his sweetheart in her sinister embrace, and sinking her strong, white teeth into Lucy's lovely throat was beginning to obsess him. He resented the intrusion of Colonel Yates and, on this night, took particular pains to manifest his annoyance.

After much discussion the wreath and sword were finally put in place, according to the prescribed directions laid down in the book purporting to be a reliable treatise upon such matters. Then, after another painstaking reference to the old volume, he assumed a defensive attitude and incanted the words:

"They shall not pass this threshold."

Lucy wanted to fling her arms about his neck and kiss him, but the presence of Sir James, Colonel Yates and Smithson deterred her. This was the more regrettable, since much was destined to befall them both ere they would meet again.

After good nights had been said, and the baronet as well as Lucy had retired, Colonel Yates, quite undisturbed by Hibbs' attitude toward him, followed the young man down the hall to his study door.

"I am coming in for a little talk with you, Mr. Hibbs," he said. "There are a number of things we must go over together before those

detectives get here from Scotland Yard. You sent the letter, did you not?"

"Yes."

Hibbs stood with his hand upon the door. His tone was mutinous. He did not want this officious stranger coming into his room to talk with him. But from the day he first met Colonel Yates he had been resentfully conscious that the man from India exerted an influence over him which he was powerless to resist. Now, the colonel quite ignored his lack of cordiality.

"That's fine," he declared, putting his shoulder lightly against the door, so that they might both enter together and thereby forcing Hibbs to permit it to swing wide. "That's a wonderful organization—Scotland Yard. Once we get them down here all this infernal mystery will be cleared up in a jiffy."

They entered and he closed the door behind them. Turning, he saw that Hibbs had paused in the center of the room and was observing him sullenly. A smouldering fire was in Hibbs' eyes, his hands tightly clinched, his face flushed feverishly.

"By Jove, my boy," cried the colonel, a note of real concern creeping into his voice, "you look completely fagged. Here, sit down in this chair and pull yourself together."

He placed his hands upon the young man's shoulders and gently forced him down into a large arm chair by the desk, near which he had been standing. His direct, forceful gaze met

Hibbs' rebellious eyes frankly and squarely. Seating himself in another chair directly opposite, he continued talking.

"You know, Hibbs, I'm getting to be an old man, and when I talked to that charming young girl this afternoon and she told me of her love for you and how happy you had made her by your thoughtfulness and companionship ever since her brother's death, I commenced to see you through her eyes, and to realize what a thoroughly capable and estimable chap you are. I want to congratulate you upon winning the love of such a girl as Lucy Balfour. She's one in a thousand."

All thought of Colonel Yates as a rival was banished from the mind of Jerry Hibbs. By the time the colonel ceased speaking the sullen look in his eyes had given place to one of dreamy rapture. He sighed, happily.

"Thank you. You are very kind. Lucy is wonderful. I'm not worthy of her. Sir James doesn't know—yet."

"H'm!" The colonel's eyes were studying Jerry intently. "Too bad about her brother. Fine chap, I hear. You and he get along pretty well together?"

Hibbs shook his head. A sudden nervousness assailed him. Again he passed one hand across his forehead as if seeking clarity of thought.

"Harry had no use for me," he muttered, looking down at his wrist watch to see the hour. "He objected to my love for his sister—

said I was no match for her—had nothing to offer. He—he was going to take her away—to Balfour House—and not let us meet any more. I hate Balfour House!"

He raised his head and encountered the Colonel's gaze full upon him. Their eyes locked. Jerry closed his. The colonel's fierce, piercing look seemed to penetrate his very soul. He felt strangely drowsy. He wondered if he were going to be ill. Then his hand fell limply to his side, his head drooped on his chest, and the colonel saw that he was sound asleep.

"Poor chap," he murmured softly to himself. "Poor chap! He's got himself in a devil of a hole."

Then he crossed the room softly and turned off the light. The chimes in the hall clock told the half-hour. It was not yet midnight.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AN ASSASSIN FOILED

"AHA! BLOOD. SOMEBODY IS SHOT"

MIDNIGHT. The fragrance of tube roses borne upon the air. A door softly opened. A stealthy footstep. A dark, formless figure crouching close against a wall. The chimes again. This time the quarter hour. Silence.

Again the dark, crouching figure moves forward. Again it stops. Somewhere a board creaked. Nothing more. The formless mass against the wall glides silently onward.

There is no one to see. No one to hear. The whole house is silent; the household asleep. What new terror approaches? What danger threatens? Yet no one awakes. No alarm is sounded. Slowly, steadily, inch by inch, that dark, lurking menace clings to the deeper shadows of the hall and relentlessly creeps on its way.

The great hall seems interminable. At the extreme end a faint gray streak appears. That is where the starlit night without tries in vain to lighten the darkness within. In a re-

mote part of the house a window is raised gently.

The crouching form becomes rigid. It waits. Silent. Motionless. Ominous. The seconds seem hours. Surely someone must awake. Someone must come to avert this monster's attack.

But no one comes. Again it moves. Only a few inches. It has reached a door. A long, thin hand reaches forth and touches the knob. The bit of metal moves softly in response. Slowly it turns. Little by little, the door yields to the steady pressure of that shrouded, formless figure. It swings silently inward. The outlines of a room become visible. Starlight gleaming through open windows makes its furnishings dim and unreal. It is very still.

There is a bed between those windows. On the bed someone is sleeping. The face of the sleeper is turned away. Will nothing halt that dread, pursuing figure near the door.

But no; it is crouching now; leaning forward, as if to pounce upon its helpless victim. On, and on, and on it creeps. Now, there is something long, shining and glistening in its thin hand. That murderous hand that reaches closer, closer, to its intended victim.

There must be no mistake, now. No hesitancy. No unsteadiness. The bright, gleaming object almost touches the throat of the sleeper. The hulking form bends over like the shadow of death itself.

At last! The helpless man on the bed senses

his danger. He turns suddenly in his sleep. His outflung arm strikes aside the gleaming instrument of death. His face comes into the line of starlight from the open window.

The man is Colonel Yates.

What a clear conscience! To sleep so soundly under the very hand of death!

But the crouching, formless, shrouded figure rises to full height. Panic stricken, it flees. It overturns a chair. It collides with a table. It darts out the door and along the hall as if all hell were in pursuit.

But was the colonel asleep? Could a sleeping man have aroused from such heavy slumber to be so keenly alert, so vitally wide awake, in that instant when the would-be assassin sprang back at sight of his countenance? Who knows?

Those who heard the bark of his automatic as he tore along the hall in pursuit of the flying figure could only say that when they hurried from their various sleeping apartments they found him standing near the head of the stairs, a smoking pistol in his hand and clad in his usual suit, but with a pajama jacket on in lieu of a coat.

"I tried to get him, but missed," he told Sir James when the baronet hurried out of his room, wild-eyed, haggard, and trying with shaking hands to fasten the strings of his dressing gown about him.

"Where—where was he?" he gasped.

"Well, now that I'm thoroughly awake," re-

turned the colonel, apparently much humiliated, "I am afraid I will have to confess that I've had a frightful nightmare. I thought Smithson's old man came through the keyhole and—I never awakened till I shot at him. Such is the effect of a too hearty appetite and over excitement. I am sorry—I am terribly sorry for having caused so much disturbance."

Sir James, much relieved to know that it was nothing more serious, was most courteous in accepting his host's apologies. Lucy called from within her barricaded door to know what was the trouble and if they would remove the sword so she might come out.

Upon receiving the colonel's assurance that it was all the result of a nightmare, she declared she would scold him in the morning and was going straight back to bed.

"I think that is what we will all do," returned the colonel, stepping forward to hold open the door of Sir James' room that the baronet might enter. "I am sincerely sorry to have disturbed everyone, just as they were enjoying their first night's rest for several days," he said.

"It's quite all right, my dear colonel," Sir James assured him. "Don't think of it again, I beg of you."

The colonel thanked him again and said good night. Those of the servants who had come running at the sound of the shot had already returned to their beds.

At the door of his own room the colonel

paused, looked carefully about him, listened a moment and then, revolver still in hand, stepped cautiously back along the passage to a point midway between Hibbs' sleeping room and the head of the stairs. There, he knelt down and felt about on the floor for something. Not finding what he sought the first time, he tried again at a point a few inches distant. There he had better results for he rose almost at once and stood, thumb and fingers of his left hand extended, while his eyes narrowed and his mouth and chin took on the appearance of a watchdog making ready to spring.

"Aha!" he muttered to himself. "Blood—fresh blood. Somebody is shot."

His head was nodding sagely as he retraced his steps to his room. He entered, washed his hands, donned his coat and carefully brushed his hair.

"Hibbs was not in the hall," he mused. "And the baronet never asked where he was. Bad, very bad indeed. Well, I'll have to go find out."

But before going to the young secretary's room he made another excursion into the hall, this time in the direction of Lucy's door. All was as it should be. The colonel paused briefly, then descended the stairs as far as the landing below, where several suits of armor and a cluster of swords figured in the scheme of decoration.

There, also, everything was arranged to his satisfaction, apparently, for he turned almost

at once and retraced his steps, this time continuing to Hibbs' room.

The door was wide open. The colonel pressed the switch that turned on the lights. The first thing that met his gaze was the bed. It was tumbled as if the person who had slept there had departed hurriedly. The colonel crossed to it and, with the deftness of a woman, proceeded to make it up as neatly as it was before being opened for the night.

This done, he entered the alcove study, adjoining. There sat Hibbs, in his chair at the desk, just as he had drowsed off while the colonel was talking to him some hours before. He had not moved. One might have thought him dead.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE FALLEN SWORD

"LUCY! WHERE IS LUCY?"

When Jerry Hibbs opened his eyes and raised his head in response to the colonel's voice, he was dazed and confused.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" he exclaimed, his face, which had been singularly pale a moment before, flushing with embarrassment. "How could I have been so rude? I hope you will excuse me."

His very boyishness appealed to the brusque colonel. "Don't mention it, old chap," he exclaimed, slapping the younger man genially on the shoulder. "We've had a jolly good chat and I apologize for keeping you up so late. You were pretty well fagged, you know, when we came up. Better get to bed now, as quick as you can."

In after years Jerry Hibbs always referred to himself as a fool for not having acted upon the colonel's advice, and gone to bed and to sleep. Not possessing the powers of divination, he looked at his watch.

Half past two! Incredible. Surely he and the colonel had not been talking all that time. He took off the watch and shook it, then held it to his ear. It was an absurd action, he realized, because if the watch had stopped, the hour would not be half past two; the time had been half past ten when he looked at it last. Well, he reflected, if they had been talking all that time, he must have been a stupid conversationalist, for he could not remember a word of what they had said. How long, he wondered, had he been asleep.

He thought of pictures he had seen, when a boy, of Rip Van Winkle; and chuckled a bit as he likened himself to that gray-bearded slumberer.

"Well, I'm glad I awakened before my beard grew, anyway," he told himself, as he stroked his chin reflectively.

Little by little his thoughts came back to the events of the day previous and the difficulty he and the gardener had experienced in fashioning that wreath of tube roses. He wondered if it had proved efficacious. Strangely enough, he did not feel in the least degree sleepy. On the contrary, he was unusually wide awake.

He rose, stretched and paced the length of the room and back. Pausing again by the desk he took up a little, framed picture of Lucy and studied it long and lovingly.

"A girl in a thousand!" That was what the colonel had said. Strange he had not realized before what a dashed fine man the colonel was.

And how interested he had been in placing that sword at Lucy's door.

"It will keep everybody out," he said. "No one in the house must touch it or the spell will be broken. For if one person walks in at the door the vampyrs will pass through the keyhole." So even Smithson was barred out. The colonel, himself, had fastened the sword in place. Hibbs had no doubt of its security. Nevertheless, he wished he had seen to it personally. He would feel better—more certain that Lucy was safe.

"I think I'll just slip off my shoes and toddle down the hall to be sure that everything is all right before I turn in," he muttered to himself, as he replaced the picture.

He unfastened his shoes, pulled them off and put on his softest slippers. Then he stole forth into the hall and to the door of Lucy's room.

As he approached, something, a sixth sense, perhaps, told him that all was not right. He paused and listened a moment but heard nothing to cause apprehension. Nevertheless, he found himself in a cold perspiration, loath to proceed, yet incapable of retreat.

Some strange influence urged him to go back and go to bed as the colonel had advised. An even more compelling influence persuaded him to carry out his plan and make sure that Lucy was safe.

His heart, as he neared her door, seemed to be beating in his throat. His ears were alert to any sound of mysterious import. None came.

He tried to steel his nerves and subdue the wild beating of his heart that he might be prepared for what was before him. Whatever happened, he told himself, he must remain calm and courageous.

The door, when he reached it, seemed to stare at him, mockingly, like an animate thing. He put out his hand and touched it. Where—where was the sword? Frantically he ran his hands over the smooth panels of the door and around its frame. Nothing there. Trembling, almost sobbing in his excitement, he stooped and looked about on the floor. It was futile. Everything was gone. The protective measures in which they had placed so much faith had disappeared as completely as if they had never been.

Quickly following this realization came the thought of Lucy, herself. Had she vanished also? Had some mysterious, occult power carried her away bodily and left no more trace than had been left of the magic emblems they had placed before her door? The wild unreasoning thoughts crowded through his consciousness with the lightning rapidity of memories to a drowning man. Forgetful of all else he called her name.

"Lucy! Lucy! For God's sake, are you there?"

He was shaking the door, pounding upon it with his fists, imploring Lucy to answer and tell him that she was safe.

No sound came from within her room but

other voices called and other footsteps came running at the first frantic shout of her name.

Almost simultaneously the doors of the colonel's room and that of Sir James were thrown violently open. The colonel was first to reach Hibbs. He was still fully clothed. Evidently he had no intention of going to bed. The baronet, shaking and trembling like a victim of palsy, was again struggling with his dressing gown.

"Good Lord! Hibbs, what is all this excitement about?" exclaimed the colonel. He laid his powerful hands upon Hibbs' shoulders and pulled him back from the door as if he had been a child. "Oh, I see. The sword is gone! Now how'd that happen? Don't get excited. Look about a little. Perhaps we'll find it."

"But Lucy isn't there, either. At least, she doesn't answer," cried Hibbs. And again he raised his voice and called her name.

"You damned idiot!" shrieked the baronet, even more excited than his secretary. "When you speak to my ward, you address her as Miss Balfour. Of course she is in her room. Where else would she be? And what are you doing out here at this time of night, anyway? Why haven't you been to bed?"

Even in his excitement, the fact that both Hibbs and Colonel Yates did not appear to have retired, seemed to trouble him.

"Miss Balfour! Miss Balfour!" called the colonel, thrusting his shoulder with all his

strength against the door. "Let us know if you are all safe, Miss Balfour."

But there was no answer, no sound of any kind from within the room.

"Break the lock," piped the thin, sharp voice of the baronet. "My God! If anything has happened to her I'll—"

He did not finish the sentence, for the lock suddenly gave way before the colonel's vigorous onslaught, and they all three dashed into the room.

Lucy was not there!

They rushed frantically from room to room, seeking some trace of her. There was none.

"She was here when you fired that revolver," cried Sir James, ignoring Hibbs and addressing himself to the colonel. "She was frightened and wanted the sword removed, don't you remember?"

"What revolver? I didn't hear any revolver shot!" Hibbs called excitedly from a great chest he was examining. He thought Lucy might have been slain and her body thrust into it. "When did all that happen?"

The other two did not seem to hear him. The colonel found the sword. It was in its proper place on the stair landing. The wreath of tube roses was under the window.

At sight of it, Hibbs' distress was pitiful. His movements became frantic; destitute of purpose. He kept pressing his hands against opposite sides of his head and groaning aloud. In vain the colonel begged him to go to his

room and lie down, leaving him and Sir James to inaugurate a search.

"They're vampyrs—regular vampyrs," Hibbs kept repeating wildly. "They've carried her off. We'll never see her again. Her life was in danger while I was asleep!"

He dropped into a chair and buried his head in his hands. His state was one verging upon madness or the delirium of fever. Suddenly he sprang up and rushed toward the door. His soul, he declared, thirsted for revenge.

"I'm going to destroy them," he called back. "I'm going to destroy them according to the directions printed in the book."

The colonel sought to restrain him.

"Mr. Hibbs, come back here," he called. "You're ill, I tell you, Hibbs. You don't know what you're about."

Sir James, standing in the center of the deserted room considering what was best to be done, suddenly raised his head and glared after the retreating form of his secretary.

"Oh, let him go—let him go, I say. The blithering idiot! If it had not been for him this never would have happened. I used to think he had some sense. Now I think he's an ass."

"Very fine young man," remarked the colonel. "Remarkable scholar."

"Well, he needn't think he is going to marry my ward."

"Your ward, at the present time, seems to be missing," the colonel returned drily. He was

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *London After Midnight.*

LUCY BALFOUR ENCOUNTERS THE MAN IN THE BEAVER HAT AND THE BAT GIRL.

evidently annoyed. "According to my way of thinking the important consideration just now is, how are we going to find her?"

Some of the servants came running in. Those who had not been aroused by Sir James' frantic ringing of the bell had been stirred to action by Hibbs. Gallagher, the Irish chauffeur, appeared in the doorway.

On that instant a cry sounded on the early morning air. A cry, shrill, horrible, heart-rending. It came from the direction of Balfour House. Now it died away into what might have been sobs; again it rose to a high pitch like a wail of despair. It was a woman's cry, wild, sustained, terrible.

"My God!" gasped the baronet. His face went white as chalk. "What was that?"

In the doorway the chauffeur stood motionless, his mouth open, one hand partially upraised. He was listening intently, as if trying to locate and recognize that fearful, blood-curdling cry.

"Whist!" he warned. "'Tis a warnin'. That wasn't Miss Lucy, sor. 'Twas th' banshee o' Balfour House. We heard ut, th' night we wint to search for Master Harry. 'Tis onwholesim, sor, an' manes more throuble."

The cry died away, and across the countryside there came again the prolonged, mournful howl of a dog.

"Good God!" exclaimed the colonel. "When are these horrors to cease?"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE MAN IN THE BEAVER HAT

"WE SHALL SOON KNOW ALL"

STRANGE things were indeed happening at Balfour House, that weird rookery, with its ghostly footsteps, bats, cobwebs, banshee and vampyrs.

If, on this night, any of these were there, all must have been active. The old man with the spectral grin never ceased to patrol the grounds and house. With his scraggly white hair, his long cloak and high, beaver hat he wandered now here, now there. Lantern in hand, he climbed the dusty stairs of the house to the secret room. No padlock door barred his passage. No bats flapped in his face.

And up in that secret chamber, slowly moving to and fro, to and fro, was that large-eyed, pallid-faced, bat-like creature in the form of a woman, whose grotesque convolutions had so appalled Sir James a night or so before.

There was little conversation.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes."

"Then you had better come down. She has

already started. If her flight is discovered I'll carry her. She may be followed."

"Have the others arrived?"

"Not yet. Too soon. There will be a signal."

They descended the stairs together, the old man with the beaver hat leading the way with his lantern.

Out in the ruined gardens, amid the broken marble columns and statuary, with the whispering trees interlaced over their heads and the early morning mists enshrouding them, they took up their position and waited.

It was not long.

"There! I see her." The old man pointed over the bat-woman's shoulder to the figure of a girl, appearing dimly amid the shadows. As she drew near, other figures which seemed to have been keeping watch and guard over her, vanished among the trees. If she knew that she had been thus accompanied by unseen protectors she gave not the least indication of the fact.

On she came, slowly, steadily.

"I will step aside," said the old man. "I might frighten her. Let her speak to you, first." He disappeared instantly.

The girl came on. It was Lucy. She was without hat or wrap. Timidly she approached the silent, solemn-visaged woman, standing motionles before her. When she spoke, it was like that of a child who has been taught to repeat, parrot-like, certain memorized lines.

"Here I am. I heard your voice, calling to me. I have come to do your bidding."

Without appearing to move the woman glanced warily about from right to left. All was silent. She did not move her lips, but from between her firm, white teeth there issued low words, which only Lucy could possibly have heard.

"No alarm? No pursuit?"

Lucy shook her head, no.

"There may be. Be prepared. Come." She took Lucy by the hand and moved silently with her toward the stone steps which descended from the terrace to a side door of the house. "You know the way?"

"Certainly. It's my home."

They had not reached the steps when a terrifying sound shattered the stillness. It shrieked, wailed and sobbed. It had a high, piercing note like a woman's voice. It came from somewhere high above their heads, possibly in the old clock tower, from which a tiny speck of light was visible.

Involuntarily, Lucy gave a start of surprise. She would have cried out, herself, had not the bat-woman's strong, shapely hand been clapped, with lightning swiftness, across her mouth.

" 'Sh!" warned the woman. "It's nothing. They're awake—coming. Whatever 'appens don't scream."

The warning was given none too quickly. The next instant Lucy felt herself caught up in a pair of muscular arms and carried bodily into

the house. There was lantern light within. The girl turned her head to see who her bearer was. To her horror, it was the old man described by Smithson. She struggled, and again started to shriek, but was able to subdue the impulse upon catching a glimpse of the bat-woman's eloquent eyes looking down upon her as she was deposited upon the floor.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I did not know—I had not expected—"

"Hush! Don't talk now. Someone may be near," said the woman, still maintaining her expressionless composure. "We must go upstairs."

Lucy sighed. Tears sprang to her eyes. It was the first time she had entered the house since she had been led forth, weeping, after her father's funeral, to spend the rest of her girlhood under the guardianship of Sir James Hamlin.

She paused and looked tearfully about.

"It all seems so strange--so mysterious," she murmured. "If you please, won't you tell me who you are?" She was staring, like one fascinated, at the grinning old man whose eyes, now that she saw them closely, did not look old, but young and keenly alert. He was no longer stooped and deformed. Instead, he stood quite erect by her side and gently pinched her cheek to assuage her fears.

But before either he or the woman could speak there came a sound from without. A stealthy, creeping sound and then—footsteps.

The man and woman exchanged glances. Instantly the man became stooped. His fingers neared Lucy's throat. From over her shoulder the bat-woman leaned forward and placed her teeth firmly over a tiny jet pin upon Lucy's shoulder. From between his horrible teeth the man almost hissed his words,

"Someone prowling. Play the game. You're all safe. Don't move."

The same instant a window crashed and a man tumbled into the room at their feet.

CHAPTER TWENTY

HIBBS' MADNESS

"I GO TO DESTROY THEM"

WHETHER it was telepathy or lover's intuition that prompted Hibbs to investigate the sword barrier at Lucy's door will never be known. It is sufficient that but for his prompt action in so doing, many of the events which afterward transpired would not have occurred.

After his first wild outbreak, when he left Sir James and the colonel still trying to find some trace of Lucy, the excited young fellow rushed headlong to where the servants were gathered in the hall below. Everyone in the house was now awake, nervous and apprehensive.

This feeling was increased at sight of Hibbs. He was wild-eyed, disheveled and babbling to himself. They showered him with questions. He looked at them oddly, the craft and cunning of a madman lurking in his eyes.

"Sh!" he whispered, placing a finger upon his lips to warn them to silence. "Keep quiet. They'll hear you. They're all about." He tiptoed here and there, looking into corners,

down on the floor and up at the ceiling. "They're vampyrs, I tell you. They'll come up behind you and seize you."

One of the maids cried out in terror. Hibbs glared at her. "Are you one?" he hissed. There was such menace in his look and tone that the poor girl cowered before him.

"Oh, no, Mr. Hibbs," she replied, tremulously. "You know that. I ain't done anything."

"Well, fetch me an axe."

"Yes, Mr. Hibbs."

The maid, terrified out of her wits, and glad of an opportunity to escape from his presence, curtseyed and fled precipitately.

"Oh, my soul and body!" whispered the housekeeper. "The poor young man is mad."

"Let 'im alone. Don't cross 'im," warned one of the men, "or he'll murder us in cold blood."

"Good Lord! Wot a plice—wot a plice," groaned a subdued voice in the background.

Hibbs had the center of the floor. He stood silent, oblivious of their whispers, apparently in deep reflection. He cocked his head sagely and beat his fingers together with a gentle tattoo.

"An axe and a hickory stake," he muttered. "That's it. That's what the book said. An axe and a hickory stake. A stake through the heart. No vampyr can live with a stake through the heart. Aha! Stand back. I am the one to do it, not you."

Hibbs misunderstood the intention of the man who stepped forward to lay hands upon him. The fierceness of his words and his known prowess as an athlete made the man immediately retreat.

The maid who had been bidden to fetch an axe failed to return. Hibbs did not wait. He remembered his original grief and again grew violent.

"Go, quick; find her," he shouted. "Find Miss Lucy. She's gone, I say." He waved his arms and started running through the hall toward the rear of the house. "They've taken her away. We will never see her again. The vampyrs have her. They'll kill her. They'll kill her, just as they did her brother. Oh, Lucy —Lucy—I'm coming. I will destroy them and save you."

He tore through the kitchen and out the door to the pile of hardwood where the sticks for the fire-places were chopped. There was the axe, its blade deeply imbedded in the great chopping block. Before any of the horrified and panic-stricken servants could reach him, even had they been courageous enough to do so, he caught up the axe and began wielding it furiously upon a length of wood, shaping one end of it to a point. Two such lengths he sharpened. Only a few strokes of the axe were necessary.

Then, with the two stakes under his arm and the axe still in his hand, he rushed on his way, leaping over obstacles, crossing flower beds,

taking the shortest cuts in the direction of Balfour House.

"I go to destroy them—I go to destroy them," he muttered aloud as he ran. There was no one to intercept him, none to overtake.

Behind him, the household was in turmoil. The fact that Miss Lucy had actually vanished superseded all other considerations. She was idolized by all the servants. Not one of them cared what Hibbs did. Let him carry out his intention if he could. Let him find the person or creature that had made off with that beautiful young girl, and wreak vengeance in his own way. They would certainly not interfere; especially when the avenger was armed with anything so formidable as an axe and a hickory stake!

So the poor fellow crashed onward, raving deliriously, striking this way and that with the axe to clear his path of trailing vines and overhanging branches. Within sight of Balfour House the swiftness of his run slackened and finally slowed down to a halt. He was staring at a moving light within the mansion.

With the cunning and stealth characteristic of persons mentally ill, Hibbs now exerted great caution. The feeling came over him that he was being followed, that someone or something invisible was about to pounce upon him and prevent him from carrying out his purpose. He looked about warily. He stooped low and crept under a window.

"Now, I'll catch them," he told himself, and

he shuddered from head to foot. It was strange that his head should pound so, he thought. Perhaps there was a vampyr on top of him, trying to keep him from climbing up to where the light was. He struck twice over his head to knock it off. Now, where was that light, anyway? It seemed to have moved. Ah, there it was! On the main floor. No use waiting down there at those barred, basement windows. He'd go up.

Steps? Path? Nonsense. The vampyrs would hear him. They would vanish; fly away; take Lucy with them. It was clear that the only thing to do was surprise them; take them unawares.

He felt about on the wall of the house for something he could grasp; something to cling to while he climbed those rough stones. His fingers came in contact with a stout substance that seemed to be rope, but which was in reality nothing but a vine. He was unconscious that the axe had slipped from his grasp; that the pointed stakes had been deposited and forgotten on the soft turf below.

For another idea had taken root in his brain, directing his thoughts in a new channel. He would watch, listen and, when he saw Lucy, he would rush among them, catch her up in his arms and leap off somewhere—anywhere, so they could not pursue and he would not feel that awful hammering in his head.

He clutched the thick vine stalk and drew himself upward. It was not far. He thought

it a long distance. He swung himself over a balustrade onto a verandah. Had he but known it, a flight of five steps a little further on would have brought him to the same position without exertion.

He paused to look and to recover his breath. The light still shone from the leaded windows. He crossed the verandah with noiseless tread and peered through the dust-encrusted window panes into the room within.

For the moment he became riveted to the spot. His pounding head seemed to whirl. He put up his hands to hold it in place. Assured that it was steady, he again focused his eyes upon the scene within the room.

Thank God! There she was. There was Lucy, unharmed. But who—what were these people with her? What were they doing to her? She was under their power. She did not move from them. She stood helpless. Now—Oh, God save her! That man—that stooping figure in the cloak and beaver hat—his fingers were at her throat. And that other—that tall, bat-like woman—she had bared her teeth. She was bending over Lucy. She was setting her teeth in Lucy's lovely, white neck to suck her blood and leave her there, dead!

Never had Hibbs imagined a scene so horrible. He tried to shout to them to desist; to call Lucy's name—tell her that he was near—that he would save her. But his tongue, his lips refused. He could not speak. He felt himself drifting off into space, leaving her

there, helpless, at the mercy of these foul fiends from whom he could not save her.

"An axe and a hickory stake—a stake through the heart of a vampyr!"

The words recurred to his consciousness. They swam before his eyes, obliterating for the moment the vision of Lucy and her captors. Oh, God! She had gone. She had been swept from his sight. Down, down, down— He must leap after her.

He leaped.

Crash came the world about his ears. It sounded like glass. Giant creatures pounced upon him, struggled with him, held him down and fastened his arms and his feet. At last, it was all over. They were bearing him away. The motion was pleasant, soothing. It was not so bad to be a vampyr after all. He was one. He was sure of it, now. He was flying off into space and Lucy was whispering his name.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

HELP FROM SCOTLAND YARD

"EVERYTHING IS READY"

"WELL, we are on a red-hot trail, now, I guess. Here's a letter from Sir James Hamlin asking that several men be sent down to his place at once. He wants them to come between midnight and dawn to investigate a man who recently became a tenant of his and who, he has reason to believe, is a menace to the community."

"Good. Let's all go."

"I wish we could. It will be a highly interesting affair, I fancy."

Joyous anticipation rang in the voices of the speakers. They were keen-eyed men in the office of the Assistant Commissioner. For three days the Criminal Investigation Department had been on the *qui vive*. Speculation was rife. Bets were being made. Everything indicated that Scotland Yard was at last getting at the bottom of another first class crime that was decidedly out of the ordinary.

It had required patience to wait, month after month and, in the case of Roger Balfour's sup-

posed suicide, year after year, to get the results wanted. But sooner or later success was bound to come. Now it seemed close at hand.

"I guess Burke must have hit on the right solution."

"Don't be too sure. There's many a slip, you know."

"Quick work, I'd say."

"I don't call five years quick."

The Assistant Commissioner smiled, but tapped the letter thoughtfully.

"Those five years," he said, "were but an interval during which one man clung to his own ideas and theories against all odds. So far as this office was officially concerned that matter was solved conclusively at the time. Those who checked up on Roger Balfour's death were not satisfied; but in the face of the fact that they had no evidence to the contrary —and the certainty that no such evidence was extant—we were compelled to accept the only solution possible under the existing circumstances.

"Not until there was actually some working basis, something more tangible than one man's personal opinion, to warrant the detachment of a first class man from all other cases, equally important, to concentrate upon this one, could we undertake such a step.

"With the death of young Harry Balfour, certain vague leads were secured by the man sent down secretly to check up. He was sent

secretly for the particular reason that Chief Inspector Burke requested it. The matter was handled entirely by the local police, just as in the former instance. But this time, not even they knew that we had a man on the scene.

"What our man discovered that they did not, is known only to Burke. Everything was turned over to him privately for judgment and analysis. He was not free at the time to give it undivided attention. There the case rested—if it was a case. Burke was the man who decided that it was, and that there was but one way of running the criminal to earth. He was told to proceed. This letter is the result."

"Then everything is ready for the chase."

"And we are to be in at the finish."

"Yes, if you don't have a blow-out. The letter did not reach me promptly. I was called out of the office and did not get back as soon as I expected. So you are starting late."

A man appeared in the doorway. He nodded to the Assistant Commissioner. The latter continued speaking.

"Your car is at the door now." He referred to a memorandum on his desk. "Remember, when your car is sighted there will be a signal —a siren. Your answer will be a howl."

"The same, sir?"

"I suppose so."

"Hope it wasn't busted when they kept it going so long the other night."

"Oh, I guess it's good for one more whoop."

"All right. Good luck. Make time, now."

"We will, sir."

The several men selected for this night round-up of a master criminal filed out the door and into a waiting car. The car, like a high mettled steed, lunged forward almost before they were seated. It was dark and gray, like the night. With its long hood and blazing eyes it swept through London like a hungry, savage beast in pursuit of its prey.

Two nights previous it had made the same run, but for a different purpose and with other men. It had made the return trip without them. Now it was tearing along the roads in an effort to break its own best record. The man at the wheel was a speed demon.

They dashed by public buildings and churches, looming sentinel-like in the thin gray haze. They crossed bridges and whirled around corners on two wheels. They passed the court where the murderer they were tracking would appear at the bar of justice, and the prison where he would be confined. They did not even slacken their speed when they skirted the border of the graveyard in which his body would be laid away after justice had been accomplished and he had paid with his life the penalty for his crimes.

"Who is he?" asked one of the men of his companions. "Who is the man we are to get?"

"Don't ask me," replied one of the others quickly. "I don't even know that it is a man. It may be a woman."

"But the letter said a man had recently rented his house," protested another.

"What his letter said doesn't matter. I've been on such cases before. He may be lying; and then, again, he may only be frightened. But I am willing to wager there's a woman in the case. There always is. I never knew it to fail."

"Well, man or woman, old or young, ugly or beautiful, we're after you, and we are going to get you. We have our reputations to live up to, you know; and the C. I. D. of Scotland Yard must always get its man—or woman."

The last speaker was right, and the others knew it. They were like a pack of well-trained hunting dogs on a scent. To fail to run down their quarry, or by too precipitate action to spoil the well laid plans of their superiors, would brand them incompetent and unfit for duty. These men were thoroughbreds, each in his own class.

There was no further attempt at conversation. The car was going too fast. The men knew that at some post of observation watchful eyes were on the look-out for their coming. They knew that one of the men on the rear seat of their car must be attentive and ready for instant action at a certain intersection of the road near the grounds of Balfour House.

They were rapidly nearing that point.

"Ready, Joe?" asked one. He had been over the route so often that he knew every tree and curve along the way.

"All ready," returned the one addressed as Joe.

The car shot around a bend where, for a few rods, the trees on either side of the road were not so closely set.

"Quick, now," exclaimed the older man. "Let 'em 'ave it."

Like lightning Joe's arm was extended full length over his head. Three flashes of light gleamed brightly, one after the other, from the electric torch in his hand.

The car sped on.

"Well, I hope he got it."

" 'E got it. Trust 'im. There'll be no slip with Mooney and Luney on the job. They're keen, that pair!"

As if in corroboration of the speaker's words there came to their ears at that instant the high, piercing screech they had been told to expect. It was not unlike a woman's voice. It came from somewhere high over their heads and it shrieked, wailed and sobbed. Then, with a long drawn-out, tremulous moaning, it shuddered away into silence.

"Holy Moses!" gasped one of the men in front. "I guess he got it, all right. I wouldn't like to hear that thing very often. Hey, you time-keeper back there, give me a poke when I'm to howl." With his right hand he grasped a large bulb which operated a mechanical device that would have delighted the heart of a small boy.

On swept the car. Far ahead could be seen

the brightly lighted windows of the residence of Sir James Hamlin. One minute—two minutes—three minutes—

The man who had told Joe when to flash the lights leaned forward and administered a punch between the shoulder blades of the man in front who had requested that form of communication. Simultaneously the latter's hand closed down upon that huge rubber bulb.

Wow—Woo-o-o-o—Ow-o-o-o—Wow-ow-oo!

The famed "Hound of the Baskervilles" could not have produced a more blood-curdling mournful howl of distress. Even the men in the car cringed and shivered at the ear-splitting notes.

"Shall I do it again?"

"Good Lord, no! Kill the beast."

"Right-o. He's dead." The rubber-bulbed contraption was thrust out of sight under the seat.

The car turned off the main road and into the Hamlin driveway. As it neared the house those in the car could see, in one of the windows of an upper room, two men looking out as if anxiously awaiting their arrival.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

A STRANGE CONFERENCE

"THE TIME IS SET"

Colonel Yates did not hear Gallagher, the Irish chauffeur, when the latter told Sir James Hamlin that the wild, piercing cry which smote upon their ears was that of the banshee of Balfour House. But a few minutes later he did hear the long, mournful howl of a dog.

Instantly, the colonel turned, walked over to the window of Lucy's room, in which they were all gathered, and looked out. It was the first time he had heard that howl since the night of his arrival. Then, he had accompanied Sir James to the mausoleum where the baronet had discovered empty the coffin which had been supposed to contain the mortal remains of his friend, Roger Balfour.

Now the dog had howled again—and Lucy Balfour had but just disappeared. This time, however, the dog's howl was not repeated. For several minutes the colonel stood there, looking out. Of a sudden two twinkling lights became visible through the mist. A car was sweeping almost noiselessly up the driveway.

In a tone that reflected the pleasure manifest in his face, the colonel turned to his host.

"Here they come, Sir James. Just in the nick of time."

"Who is coming? Lucy?" The baronet hurried to join Colonel Yates at the window.

"No; the men you wrote for—the detectives from Scotland Yard. They'll locate Miss Balfour and fetch her back in safety, I'll wager. Let's go down."

They left the window and descended to the entrance hall. Billings was already admitting the strangers. Their leader lost not a moment in preliminaries. Looking questioningly from one to the other of the two gentlemen he saluted and said,

"We are here, sirs, in response to a request from Sir James Hamlin."

"I am he," replied the baronet, with marked effort to maintain his habitual calmness of voice and manner. Then, to Billings, who was still waiting, "Show these officers into the library. I will talk with them there."

Billings led the way to the library and the quartet of human huntsmen filed after him. A moment later Sir James, who had waited for a few confidential words with Colonel Yates, entered the room, accompanied by the colonel.

"This gentleman," the baronet said, indicating his guest, "is Colonel Yates, recently returned from India. He has had more experience than I in such things as have recently been causing us so much disquietude here, and

it was at his suggestion I wrote to your office for assistance."

The men from Scotland Yard gravely acknowledged the introduction.

"Now Colonel Yates will explain to you," Sir James continued, "just what the circumstances are and, more important than all else, their culmination, not more than an hour ago, in the disappearance of my ward, Miss Lucy Balfour. For her sake there is every need of haste. Because Colonel Yates is a military man who knows how to be expeditious, I am, in the absence of my secretary, turning everything over to him."

With a slight gesture of the hand for Colonel Yates to proceed, the baronet sat down in the chair one of the men placed for him and assumed an attitude of attention.

The colonel frowned thoughtfully and surveyed the newly arrived detectives through the lenses of his pince-nez. It was as if he were inspecting a special detail of men about to set forth on some tactical manoeuver. Apparently they were all that he desired, for he uttered no word of criticism. The men were husky and muscular, and there was a look of intelligent determination in their eyes that won an answering gleam from the piercing eyes of Colonel Yates.

"Very good," he snapped. "You men have arrived opportunely. It has just been discovered that Miss Lucy Balfour is missing from her room. A short time prior to that,

murder was attempted in this house. These things have both occurred since Sir James wrote to Scotland Yard. What he wanted investigated and solved are the uncanny and seemingly occult happenings at Balfour House, Miss Lucy's ancestral home; it is now hers by right of inheritance. She is the last of the Balfours. I have personally accompanied Sir James on his investigations. I am willing to vouch for their accuracy.

"As you men are doubtless aware, Roger Balfour's death occurred five years or more ago. It was officially recorded that he died by his own hand. Yet a visit to the Balfour mausoleum by Sir James and myself revealed the casket empty in which his body had been laid to rest. Earlier, that same day, or I should say, the day previous, for we visited the tomb after midnight, a stranger leased Balfour House from the baronet's agents. He signed the lease under suspicious circumstances. Later it was discovered that the signature was that of Roger Balfour—his name and his script.

"Though he was at first incredulous, these facts could not fail to be disturbing to Sir James. We reconnoitered outside Balfour House at night. Sir James recognized Roger Balfour as he appeared in life. Not a day older. With him was a caricature of a man, more like a grinning skeleton than a human being. According to the description given by one of the maids here, that creature was the same

one she encountered, stalking through the corridors of this house, dissolving into vapor, passing through a keyhole and, after reassembling in bodily form, sinking his devilish teeth into her neck.

"With this creature and Roger Balfour in the secret, haunted room of Balfour House, was a third man, pale and thin of face, with a receding forehead and large, round eyes, like full moons. These three were watching, in silence, the gyrations of a monstrosity—a bat-woman.

"Our deductions and our scientific researches have combined to convince Sir James that these creatures are modern manifestations of what the ancients termed vampyrs. They are unhappy, vengeful souls who roam the earth at night to suck the life blood of the young and beautiful. Miss Balfour has complained of hearing a voice calling her name. Sir James believes that these devilish apparitions bode harm to her. This fact is borne out by the fact that on the day following our observance of them, we inspected the house from top to bottom and found no trace of any human occupancy. Merely a cluster of bats. And tonight, after a prowling figure was shot at in the corridor of this house, Miss Balfour was strangely spirited away.

"Before anything else is done Sir James wishes, and I advise, you to proceed at once, before dawn, to Balfour House and be ready for instant action. Don't wait to ask ques-

tions. I have told you enough. Just go. Now, Sir James," and he drew up a chair and seated himself facing the baronet, "let me see your gun. Is it ready?"

It was. The baronet, much unnerved by the recital to which he had been compelled to listen, handed the weapon over to the colonel for inspection. The colonel examined it.

"Hasn't been used for a long time," he observed. "I wouldn't trust it. Here, officer," he called to one of the men about to go out the door, "haven't you a gun in good condition that Sir James can use in case of necessity? His is apt to be tricky."

The officer turned and picked up the baronet's weapon, looked at it, and placed it on a bookshelf. "Not safe," he remarked gruffly. "Here, take this one," pulling another from his pocket and placing it on the table at the baronet's hand. "I've got another—two of 'em—out in the car."

But the baronet was inattentive. His eyes were studying the changing expression of the colonel's face. He had turned toward him for the purpose of demurring against any change of revolvers. His was not such an obsolete weapon. He was quite sure it would respond to any pressure upon the trigger. But when he turned to say so, something, he was not conscious of what, stayed the words on his lips and held him rigid, staring straight into those forceful gleaming eyes that blazed into his like electric sparks.

Colonel Yates knew well the condition of the baronet's nerves. When he saw him sitting there so tense and rigid, his eyes staring helplessly into his own, he rose slowly to his feet and, leaning forward, made a few quick passes with his hand before Sir James' face. The baronet might have been blind. He neither moved, nor shrank from the proximity of the extended fingers. Satisfied, the colonel reached over to a small desk clock and reversed the hands until they pointed to the hour of eight. This he placed in front of the immobile Sir James.

Then, in a low, tense tone he addressed him.

"At twenty-five minutes past eight you will leave here and come to the verandah door of Balfour House."

The baronet, staring stonily before him, made no response.

Colonel Yates went into the hall, secured his hat and then rang for Billings.

"Sir James will be going out in exactly twenty-five minutes," he said. "The time is set. Do not disturb him on any account and be careful not to address him when he leaves the house."

An entirely new expression of awed respect was visible in the impassive face of the butler.

"Very good, sir," he replied, and bowed with marked deference as the colonel passed out the door.

The gray car, with motor running, stood waiting. The four men were already seated.

The colonel swung in between the two in the rear seat.

"Sir James will join us later," he said.

The car plunged forward and disappeared in the direction it had come.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

FROM OUT THE PAST

"FOR LOVE AND JUSTICE"

The tumultuous and spectacular entrance of Jerry Hibbs into the mysterious realms of Balfour House was so unexpected that for a moment Lucy was speechless; too dazed to cry out.

But in that moment two men rushed forward from out the obscurity of shadows and hurled themselves upon the prostrate figure of her lover where he lay, crashing about amid the window wreckage on the floor. Then she shrieked.

"Oh, Jerry, Jerry! Please don't hurt him," this to the men who grappled with him. And then, to those two who restrained her, "Oh, let me go—don't hold me so. They're killing him. Oh, Jerry, Jerry! Oh, why did I come here? Now they've got you, too." She was sobbing hysterically and struggling almost as desperately as Hibbs.

To his opponents Jerry proved himself an able antagonist. Despite his browsing among books, he kept himself in fine physical condi-

tion. With the added strength of delirium he now fought like a maniac. His captors did not want to hurt him; neither did they wish to suffer any damages themselves. So swift was the struggle that, in the semi-darkness, Lucy was unable to distinguish the features of those who sought to over-power him. Even had it been otherwise it is doubtful if she would have given them a thought, so great was her excitement and hysteria.

The bat-woman comforted her. In truth, she was quite as anxious as Lucy for the fray to cease without casualties.

"Don't cry, dear," she pleaded. "Please try to calm yourself. Unless you do, everything will be spoiled. So much depends on you. Didn't 'e tell you that no matter what 'appened, for you to keep quiet an' do what you was told?"

"Yes," sobbed Lucy into the folds of the woman's capacious sleeves. "But he didn't tell me anything was going to happen to Jerry. He said he would look after Jerry; and that it would not be necessary for me to tell him that I was coming away. He didn't do as he said—he didn't look after Jerry—Oh-o-o! What are they doing to him? They're holding his arms so. Don't let them tie him like that. Oh, this is awful—awful! I can't stand it."

The bat-woman's great wings closed about the weeping girl and folded her to her bosom. She even shook her to compel silence.

"Now listen 'ere," she said. "A pretty

young lady like you ought to 'ave some sense. Hi don't know any more about 'ow and w'y this bloke got 'ere than you do, but Hi know 'e wasn't expected. 'E mustn't be 'ere, and 'e's got to be put away quick."

"But they don't have to hit him and tie him," protested Lucy, striving to wriggle from out the enveloping folds that served to smother her sobs.

"Don't you 'ear 'im?" retorted the woman. " 'E doesn't know what 'e's talking about. 'E's drunk or something."

Another protesting wail from Lucy. "Jerry doesn't get drunk. He's never been drunk in his life—He told me so."

The bat-woman patted her gently on the shoulder. "There, there, dearie," she soothed, and her voice was not unpleasant. "Hit's all over, now. They've got 'im quieted. They'll just take and lay 'im down for a little while, then you can look hafter 'im your own self." Then, looking over Lucy's head to the stooped old man, who was now not stooped and who had found it necessary to lend a hand in the struggle, she asked, "What was the matter with 'im? What did 'e want?"

The man recovered his beaver hat which had been knocked off and replaced it upon his head. "Young chap's ill, I fancy. Little out of his mind. Pulse high; head hot. Too much excitement, probably. Nothing serious. Probably was frightened about the girl. Mooney will look after him—give him a sedative.

He'll sleep for a time. Then he'll be all right. We've got to work fast, now. That interruption was unfortunate. Must have been some slip or he wouldn't have been here."

Lucy, staying her sobs to listen to this conversation, began to breathe a trifle easier, though it required all her strength and will to keep quiet and see Jerry carried from her sight. But the old man, who did not seem old, was very kind; and the bat-woman told her Jerry would receive every needful attention.

Thus calmed and comforted, the distressed girl permitted herself to be conducted to a convenient room where the bat-woman had arranged various toilet accessories for temporary use.

"But first," said the bat-woman, "I think you 'ad better see 'im. Hit might be a shock, you know, and you'd best get hit over with before 'and, so you will be able to do everything all right when the time comes. We 'aven't many minutes now."

Lucy sighed. "Does he—does he really look very like father? How could he, when he never saw him?"

"There's a painting—a life size painting right 'ere in the 'ouse. That's 'ow. Now you be brave and go along and talk with 'im a bit while Hi get your dress ready." She gave Lucy a gentle shove and left her.

Timidly, fearfully, Lucy touched one side of a frayed, moth-eaten portiere, and peeked into the great room of the house—that terrible room

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *London After Midnight.*

A WEIRD EPISODE TAKES PLACE IN THE OLD BALFOUR HOME.

into which she had walked one morning and found her father dead, sitting just where she had left him when she said good night. Now, as she looked, a low cry came unbidden to her lips. She flung her hand across her mouth to stifle the sound. Her eyes clung, fascinated, to the sight she witnessed.

For he was there—her father—Roger Balfour—just as she had seen him that night—that last night, when she had sat upon his knee and refused to admit that she was fast growing into a young woman.

"I will always be your little girl, father," she had said, as she wound her arm lovingly about his neck. "I love you now, and I will love you for always and always."

How well she remembered the words, and how annoyed she had been when her father's guest had asked her if she would not love him in the same way. Then her father had kissed her good night and she had left them there, alone together. And in the morning her father was dead!

Every incident, every word was clearly imprinted upon her mind. And now, after all these years, she was again looking upon his dear face—or so it seemed—just as she knew and remembered it. There he sat, in the same chair, in the same manner. The same kindly smile upon his face, the same desk ornaments about him.

Oh, it could not, could not be that any years had passed! It had all been a horrid dream and

she was still a child. It must be so, for there was her father!

Then she glanced down at herself, tall and with a longer frock, a frock of thin, clinging black chiffon over white silk—half mourning for her dear brother, Harry.

No; the passing years had not been a dream. They were very, very real. The man she saw before her was not, could not be her father. But how like—Oh, God, how like!

Tears filled her eyes. What an ordeal she must yet undergo. She must speak to this man, talk with him, explain many details to him. Could she do it? Would she have the strength, the courage? She must have. Her brother, she knew, had been murdered. If her father, also, had been slain—as she had always instinctively felt must be the case—she was willing to give her own life, if need be, to bring the criminal, or criminals, to justice.

She fell on her knees there, in that dust-coated, decaying home of her childhood, every inch of which was endeared to her by associations, and clasped her hands together in an agony of conflicting emotions.

"Oh, dear God," she whispered, "I want to do all I can to help those who are trying to find and punish the wicked, guilty person responsible for the deaths of those I loved. It is going to be hard, very hard for me. I need help and strength that I may not cause failure to their plans by failing myself, just when so much depends on me. Please send me help,

and let my dear father know that what I am going to do is all for love and justice. I do not know who the guilty person is that they are after, and I do not understand why I should be required to do that which I have given my word I will do to the best of my ability. I have promised to trust and have confidence in a man vested with civil authority. Help me, O God, to keep my promise, that the guilty may be brought to punishment and my dear ones be avenged. I ask it, for love and justice, Amen."

It was a mental, not a verbal supplication and, when she had finished, Lucy rose from her knees, pressed to her lips a little, religious emblem which she wore on a tiny gold chain about her neck and steadied herself for the ordeal before her. But it no longer seemed an ordeal. A soothing calmness and tranquillity had come upon her. She felt composed and confident; ready to undertake whatever task was required of her.

It was with a sweet, half sad, half-shy smile that she parted the portieres, entered the room, and walked directly up to where the man was sitting, whose resemblance to her father had so impressed her. He rose at her approach.

"It is remarkable!" she said, softly, extending her hand, which trembled slightly. "So wonderful a likeness that I was shocked. I was looking at you from behind the curtains. They tell me that you wish to ask me some questions. I will answer them the best I can."

The questions were few and Lucy found it

far less difficult than she had expected to answer them. She explained in few words the incidents which had preceded her father's death, the conversation which had ensued between her and her father, and with her father's guest. She told of her affectionate good night to her father but hesitated, when asked by the stranger, about re-enacting the scene with him.

"I am so much older, now," she pleaded. "And while you look so like father, I do not know you. It would be terribly hard, and most embarrassing."

"My dear," he said, and his kindly tone recalled that of her father to her ears, "perhaps you will feel differently when I tell you that I have three daughters at home—one older, two younger than you. I understand your diffidence and I hope any one of my daughters would feel the same. But I also hope that any one of them would be willing, under as proper circumstances and for as grave a cause as the one upon which we are now concentrating, to forget, for the moment, her own personality and do what any great cinema or stage star must do to attain success in whatever rôle he or she undertakes. That is, completely ignore self and become absorbed in the thought that one actually is the character one portrays. To-night you are a little girl again. Think of yourself as such. I will do the same. Play the rôle and make it a success."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

METAMORPHOSIS

"WHO IS COLONEL YATES?"

When Lucy left the presence of the kindly, white-haired counterpart of her father, she was so exhilarated by the pathetic thought of being again a little girl that she lost all sense of present actualities.

So far as she was concerned the years had rolled back. She was mentally living over the days of childhood. Those happy days, when she and her brother had romped merrily over the grounds of Balfour House; when they had sat together beside their father and recited their lessons to him; when he had praised them, chided them, caressed and comforted them.

Through such rose-colored glasses of memory the tapestries were no longer old and faded, nor the furniture dusty and falling into decay and the velvet hangings in moth-eaten tatters. Ah no. This was home—the home of years gone by—and it was beautiful to her eyes.

With a little sigh of content she made her way across the hall and back to the waiting

bat-woman. So surrounded was Lucy in this haze of pleasant memories that she was quite unheedful of the latter's hasty remonstrance at her long delay.

"I tell you we 'aven't much time," the woman reminded her. "There's been a signal. Everything's coming hoff right on schedule. 'Ere, slip into this, quick, now."

She extended to Lucy a little, white frock, similar to one in which Lucy had been photographed when a girl of thirteen. The sight and touch of it settled her even more firmly in the spirit of the rôle which she was about to assume.

"Where did you get this dress?" she asked, as she smoothed the dainty fabric lovingly. "I had it packed away in a box."

"Miss Smithson fetched it—and these, too," returned the woman, pulling into view a box containing short socks, a broad satin hair-ribbon and other little accessories of a school-girl's costume.

"Smithson!" exclaimed Lucy. "Then she must have known about this before. And I tried to be so cunning to-night so she would not know I was running away."

"That's all right," the bat-woman made assurance, as she unfastened Lucy's hair and tied the long ringlets in girlish fashion at the back of her neck. "You needn't worry none about keeping nothing from Miss Smithson. I only wish I was arf as clever as her."

For the moment it seemed to Lucy that the

little world in which she had been living of late had quite turned topsy-turvy. Who was this mysterious Colonel Yates who seemed to be everywhere and giving directions to everyone? Why did Sir James place so much confidence in him? And why should there be anything mysterious about Smithson? The further all these plans and masquerades proceeded the more puzzling they grew. Everybody seemed to be somebody else and nobody knew exactly what it was all about or who the villain was that was going to be entrapped.

There was little time for wonderment. At the rear of the house a speeding gray car came to a sudden and noiseless stop. From it emerged several men, all of whom hurried up to the door and entered without summoning anyone to admit them.

"'E's 'ere," exclaimed the bat-woman, turning Lucy quickly about, that she might the better inspect her appearance. "'Lor', Hi'm glad you're ready. Stand by the door, there, an' see what 'e says."

Lucy, always obedient to any instruction, stepped to the door indicated. What she saw from that post of observation was totally unexpected and inexplicable.

Colonel Yates was striding along the hall in great haste. She had a glimpse of several men behind him. They paused and a thin little man ran down the stairs to conduct them into a room in the west wing. She recognized him as one of the two who had grappled with Jerry and

who had gone up stairs to minister to his needs. Instantly it flashed to her consciousness that the other man who had aided in that struggle was none other than the one now sitting in her father's chair, waiting for her to enact her rôle. It was fortunate, she reflected, that in the semi-darkness she did not note his hair and features. The sudden shock of his resemblance to her father might have caused her to faint.

But who were these newcomers? And why were so many needed? Was one of them the murderer? The questions came rapidly to her mind but there was no time to dwell upon them.

Colonel Yates paused. The man with the beaver hat hurried to intercept him. He was pulling off his cloak and handing it to the colonel.

"Minutes count, now," snapped the colonel. "How's everything here?"

"All serene," replied the other. His voice was slightly muffled for it was more or less impeded by his teeth with which he seemed to be conjuring in an effort to dislodge them entirely.

"Never mind," barked the colonel. "I don't want them. Give me the hat and wig."

The exchange was swiftly made. The colonel donned the weird habiliments and stooped crookedly. With the hat well over his face none but a close observer would have known that it was he. He stepped to a mirror and with a few deft movements did things to his face which made his disguise even more complete.

Lucy gasped in astonishment. "Tell me,"

she demanded peremptorily of the bat-woman, "who is Colonel Yates?"

"Hi can't do that, Miss Lucy," replied the woman. "You'd better arsk 'im yourself."

This, Lucy determined to do, but the surprising appearance of Smithson at that moment diverted her attention. Smithson, coming quietly in at the rear entrance of the hall, made haste to join Lucy, whose white frock she instantly espied, there in the doorway of the room where she had been bidden to wait.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Smithson, "how sweet you look. I couldn't get here a minute sooner. I had so many things to do. I followed you, though, to the edge of Hamlin grounds so I knew you were safe, for I waited there until I saw Drake pick you up."

"Pick me up!" Lucy repeated in amazement. "What on earth are you talking about? Nobody picked me up—" then she recalled her unceremonious entry into Balfour House and explained it. Smithson laughed softly.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," she said. "I meant that we wanted to make sure you were safe when you thought you were alone. So I trailed you to the edge of Hamlin grounds and there Mr. Drake—it is he who is impersonating your father, you know,—was waiting in the shadow to follow you the rest of the way."

Lucy did not know, but she was beginning to feel more and more like Alice in Wonderland, so she said nothing and waited to see what more astonishing disclosures were to be made.

"Where's Luney?" was Smithson's next business-like inquiry.

"Looney!" ejaculated Lucy, opening her large eyes to their fullest extent and feeling her heart beginning to thump wildly. "Who's looney?" The memory of Jerry thrashing about amid the broken glass of the verandah window suddenly smote upon her consciousness. If Smithson dared refer to him in that disrespectful manner she would—

But Smithson's quick explanation cut short the mental threat. "Why, the bat-woman—have you not been with her? Has she not been looking after you?" There was a note of authority in the voice of Smithson which Lucy could not recall ever having detected before. It was almost as if she purposed reproving the bat-woman.

Lucy spoke quickly in the latter's defense.

"Indeed she has," she exclaimed. "She has been perfectly lovely to me. And when Jerry came, and there was such an excitement—"

"Jerry!" gasped Smithson. "Mr. Hibbs? Here? Oh, my heavens! How did that happen? What did they do with him? I said all the time that he ought to be tied up somewhere or he would start right out combing the countryside for you."

A gleam of mischief danced in Lucy's eyes. It was almost impossible to repress her sense of humor for long at a time.

"Well, he is," she observed, demurely.

"Is what?" Smithson was impatient.

"Tied up."

"Where?"

"I don't know. They took him up stairs. They said he was not hurt and that he must go to sleep for a little while."

"Thank the Lord! I suppose Mooney gave him soothing syrup. He certainly needed it."

Lucy was a trifle uncertain how to receive this, but her uncertainty did not matter, for Colonel Yates, or rather the man she knew as Colonel Yates, hurried to them at that moment and looked her over critically.

"Fine!" he exclaimed, peering at her from under the old beaver hat. "That's just what I wanted." He turned her slowly about and touched her long ringlets admiringly. "Good thing you never had it bobbed," he remarked, "or we'd have had to get you a wig."

He tucked her hand under his arm and hurried her forward to that room where her father's double sat waiting. And as she walked, Lucy pondered those questions which she longed to ask, but dared not.

Was Colonel Yates the man in the beaver hat, or was the man in the beaver hat Colonel Yates? Was there any Colonel Yates? If not, who was he, and who was the man in the beaver hat? Who was the actual tenant of Balfour House? Who was the guest of Sir James Hamlin, and who was it represented this unseen power which seemed to envelop them all and promised, before the dawn, to reveal to her the person who slew her father?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SINISTER PREPARATIONS

"JUST FOR TO-NIGHT"

Lucy's unanswered questions as to identities resolved themselves, for the time being, into one uncontrovertible fact.

In appearance, at least, Colonel Yates was the man in the beaver hat. And in that guise he was acting in the capacity of stage director for a small and carefully selected company of actors. He was quick and nervous in his movements, and his fiery, restless eyes were everywhere.

He considered carefully the position of the table and chairs. He beckoned Lucy to him and asked her questions. Then he made careful and minute changes according to her directions. He crossed over and inspected every detail of the appearance of the man sitting in Roger Balfour's chair.

"Oh, I say, Drake," he exclaimed suddenly, "that will never do, you know. That bullet wound still shows up. Wipe it off, powder it, or something."

"I thought I had," returned the one addressed as Drake. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and rubbed vigorously at the tell-tale crimson stain on his temple. "That better?" he asked.

The colonel looked at him again. "Yes," he said, "that will do. Here, Mooney—Where's Mooney? Why isn't he here?"

"Mooney's up stairs," said a man in the doorway. "There's a sick man—"

"I don't care if there's a dead man. Get him down here. Quick."

But the fellow called Mooney was already on the stairs. " 'Ere I am, sir," he said, hurrying forward.

The colonel's eyes took in every detail of his appearance at a glance. "You'll do," he said. "Get over there, near the verandah door." Mooney obeyed.

"Now you two," the colonel continued, addressing two of the men who had come with him in the gray car, "I want right here, back of these portieres, on either side of the door. If all goes as I expect, you will simply step forward in time to prevent any exit by that door. Keep your hands off, remember, until I say the word."

"Yes, sir." The men saluted and at once secreted themselves as directed.

"Now, which of you others is the notary?" he asked, directing his gaze upon the two remaining members of the quartet that had left the Assistant Commissioner's office.

"I am, sir," acknowledged the slighter of the two.

"Very well. Have your papers ready, and wait out there in that other room until I summon you."

"Yes, sir." He vanished instantly.

"And you," turning to the last man, "I suppose, are the stenographer."

"Yes, sir."

"Are you all ready—plenty of paper—pad, pencils?"

"Everything, sir."

"Very good. You sit just outside this door. There's a table close to the wall—and a hole cut through the wall. Keep your ears open—*and don't miss a word.*"

The stenographer turned away, and the colonel crossed to where Lucy was waiting, alert and keenly interested.

"Now, my dear," he said, smiling down upon her, "we will see about you. Where were you that night?"

Lucy crossed to a chair by the table. "Sitting right here," she replied. "I had a book—this one—" indicating one that was already on the table.

"And have you rehearsed every detail in your mind? Can you go through with it? Remember, he will be playing his part, too, when he comes, and he will not forget the slightest look or word."

"Oh, I have so often thought of that night that I could not forget anything if I tried,"

Lucy explained. "But what troubles me is, how our going through with all this will have anything to do with bringing a guilty person to justice,—unless—" she paused and looked confidingly into his face as if she thought him capable of accomplishing anything extraordinary he desired— "unless you have the criminal already here in the house."

That conclusion was the one she clung to and the colonel did not enlighten her further.

"You will know all in good time," he declared. "And you must be very, very brave. Now, take your place there by the table. Be quick, please. And later, after you have said good night and left the room just as you did on that other night, do not wait anywhere near this room. Go right along to the room where you will find the woman waiting for you. And —I believe there is someone on the floor above who might need your attention."

"Oh, thank you," Lucy exclaimed, and the look in her eyes evidenced the sincerity of her gratitude.

Thus dispersed to their several stations, a strange silence fell upon the house. A silence that was pregnant with life and action, threatening, ominous; ready at any moment to break forth, volcano-like, and engulf every one of those concerned in a whirling maelstrom of confusion and cataclysm.

Lucy's heart began to throb painfully. Misgivings came to her. Could it be possible that she was doing wrong? That these people were

deceiving her in any way? They were all strangers—all except Smithson and the colonel? And now she had discovered that there was something mysterious about each of them. Had they told her the truth about Jerry? She had just heard the colonel—or was he the man in the beaver hat?—say that he didn't care if there was a dead man up stairs. Was Jerry dead? Even if he were only sick, what would he think of her, that she had not hastened to his side?

That great silence which now pervaded the house! How terrifying it was. A moment before she had been alert, curious, interested in all that was going on about her. Now, she was sitting, breathless; waiting, waiting—for what, she did not know.

Why had they not told her? Why was Sir James not there? It was strange that the colonel and he had not arrived together. Sir James could have played his rôle just as well. And those men behind the curtains! Why should they crouch there, like wild beasts, to pounce upon their prey? If there was a murderer loose and he was known, would not the simplest thing have been to call an officer and have him arrested? Surely all this mystery and subterfuge and play-acting was not necessary.

The longer she waited and the more she thought, the greater seemed to grow the stillness about her. It was oppressive, overwhelming. She raised her eyes and glanced cautiously

about for Colonel Yates. He was nowhere in sight. The realization of that fact startled her. Upon him she had depended. It had been due entirely to the solemn promise she had made him that day in the rose garden that she had come to Balfour House. He, in turn, had promised on his honor that no harm would come to her, and that if she followed his instructions the murderer of her father and brother would be brought to punishment.

Well, she had kept her promise, now let him keep his. It was true, no harm had come to her so far. Perhaps the colonel had gone to fetch the murderer. But no. He was coming alone. She saw him descending the stairs beyond the door into the hall. He was walking swiftly, noiselessly, like a cat. He raised a warning finger. There had been no noise; now it seemed that no one even breathed.

It was terrible to sit there, so still, and know that always those two pairs of cold, stern, relentless and pursuing eyes were looking out from behind the portieres, following every slightest move, waiting—waiting—for what?

And now, even the colonel, disguised as he was with beaver hat and cloak, vanished behind a screen. Through its apertures Lucy could now detect his eyes, also, looking forth, more steady, more fierce, more penetrating than any she had ever before beheld. The whole performance, she had been told, was "just for to-night."

The night was beginning to seem interminable.

"Oh, how thankful I shall be," Lucy thought, as she sat there, too frightened to turn the pages of the book she held on her lap, "when this dreadful night is over." Then she felt herself grow cold and tense in a moment.

Someone was crossing the verandah!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

SIR JAMES PAYS A CALL

"YOU SEEM DESPONDENT, ROGER"

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick—

Sir James Hamlin was not conscious of watching the hands of the almost silent little desk clock that for years had faced him as he sat at his library table.

But no man keeping a death-watch could have kept his eyes more rigidly fixed upon a time-piece than the baronet was doing on that night when his guest, and the men from Scotland Yard, had left him to himself.

Tick-tick-tick-tick—

How the minutes passed! Tick-tick-tick-tick—

It was not minutes, but days, that were fleeing away into oblivion. Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick—

Days? Yes; but what of the years? Tick-tick-tick-tick— The sands of a man's life were passing while that interminable, countless reiteration of sound tolled off the atoms of time that made for eternity. Tick-tick-tick-tick—

It never ceased. It had ticked just as precisely and with just such cadence on that other

night so long gone by, when Sir James had left his home to pay a visit to his friend, Roger Balfour.

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick—

Roger Balfour died—but the clock ticked on! Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick—

The hands of the clock pointed to twenty-five minutes past eight.

Sir James Hamlin rose from his chair, turned from the ticking clock and walked with his accustomed poise out to the hall. He was grave and appeared preoccupied. He did not even observe Billings when the latter handed him his hat and stick. But at the door he turned slightly to say,

"I am going to call at Balfour House."

Then he continued on his way, maintaining the same precise gait which he habitually affected.

Billings, standing in the doorway, watched him for a time, then sighed, shook his head sadly, and retreated into the house.

For several days many happenings had been strangely mystifying to Billings. He had a presentiment that calamity was imminent. Sir James was not himself; he appeared nervous and distrait. Miss Lucy had disappeared. Hibbs was mad. Several of the servants had given notice. And that lovely Anna Smithson had packed her belongings and left without saying good-bye! Merely a note. Billings, after he had closed the door, took it from his pocket and read it for the third time.

"Dear Mr. Billings: I thank you and the others for the kindnesses I have received since I came to Hamlin House. I hope my sudden going away will not cause inconvenience, but it is necessary that I leave at once. To-morrow, a baggageman will call for my luggage. Believe me, dear Billings, very regretfully,

Anna Smithson."

"A lovely woman—a very lovely woman," Billings muttered, with a sigh. "And she never left an address!"

He was refolding the paper when his eyes lighted upon a faintly penciled postscript:

"P.S. Thank you so much for the spirits you gave me after I had been frightened by that terrible ghost that came through the keyhole. Perhaps I had had a drop too much before I saw it, so tell the others not to leave. They are quite safe—if they stick to tea."

Billings stared blankly at the words, then dropped into the nearest chair and supported his head with his hands.

"I never would 'ave thought it," he repeated again and again. "Anna Smithson! As fine a woman as ever I've seen. But I'm glad she told me. Now the others will stay. I'd 'ave been in a precious 'ole if they all 'ad packed up and left."

Meanwhile, Sir James was continuing his steady, preoccupied walk. When he reached the grounds of Balfour House he paused a moment to look about him.

"Wonderful old place," he observed to himself. "These grounds, united to those of Hamlin, will make the combined properties one of the finest in England."

Then he proceeded, with slightly quickened pace, along the grass-grown walk and up the steps to the verandah door. The old iron knocker, with its brass name plate that had been in the Balfour family for generations, reverberated sonorously to his touch. Almost immediately the door was opened by a butler who received hat and stick from the baronet in the manner of an exceptionally well-trained man.

At the sound of that clamorous knocker everyone within hearing gave a startled gasp. Lucy Balfour sprang to her feet.

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed, her voice unintentionally tremulous, but full of regret. "Now we will have to postpone our reading. I wonder if that is Sir James."

As if in answer to her uncertainty, Mooney, the butler, parted the curtains and announced distinctly:

"Sir James Hamlin."

Roger Balfour rose as the baronet entered, and extended his hand. Sir James grasped it somewhat feebly but spoke in a tone of suppressed eagerness.

"Ah, good evening, Roger, good evening. I thought I would find you at home—and Lucy, too." He crossed to where the little girl stood and playfully pinched her cheek. She curt-

seyed, prettily. "I came early on your account, my dear," the baronet continued, patting her arm playfully and then stroking her soft, curling locks. "I should have been disappointed to find you had retired."

"But Lucy is going to retire immediately," said Roger Balfour, who had resumed his former seat at the desk. "She was just about to do so when you knocked."

"Why, father!" Lucy exclaimed in evident bewilderment. "I thought we—" A warning look from her father caused her to break off abruptly.

"We were both going to retire early?" he questioned, thus finishing the sentence for her. "Yes, I did say something to that effect, because I have had a slight headache to-day. But I dare say a chat with Sir James will drive it away." His tone was one of resignation.

"Why, what's the trouble, Roger? You seem despondent," the baronet interposed quickly.

The little girl ran to her father and placed her hand tenderly upon his forehead.

"Oh, father, dear, I am so sorry. Why did you not tell me before? I would not have disturbed you so much. Is there nothing I can do?"

Roger Balfour looked upon his daughter with such a wealth of affection in his gaze that an onlooker might have called it idolatry.

"Thank you, darling," he said, in response to her request to help him, "but there is noth-

ing you can do, except to run along to bed so I can discuss business matters with Sir James. I do not want to have late hours dimming your bright eyes and stealing the color from your cheeks."

She seated herself in his lap and flung one plump, white arm about his neck.

"Look! Sir James," she exclaimed, "father and I are going to have our pictures taken like this, aren't we, father?" And when Roger Balfour did not answer promptly she placed her smooth cheek against his own and moved it slowly back and forth several times before giving him her usual good night kiss.

"Don't you wish, Sir James, that you had a little girl to love you like that?" she asked, roguishly, as she slipped down from off her father's knee and stood for a moment by his side.

"I would be delighted to have you," the baronet replied, his voice sounding strangely harsh and rasping.

Lucy laughed. "But you'll never get me," she cried, with amiable defiance. "Nothing would induce me to leave my father for—for —" it was hard to think of a simile "—for any other father I've ever seen in my life. And you would not know how to be a father, anyway, because you have never had any little children to practice on."

Feeling that her argument was quite convincing, Lucy pressed another kiss upon her father's lips, then crossed to Sir James and

demurely extended her hand. "Good night, Sir James."

"Aren't you going to kiss me, too?" asked the baronet, smiling tenderly upon her. "You should take pity upon me because I have no one to caress me as you do your father. Some day I think I shall have to steal you."

The smile fled from Lucy's face. She became suddenly serious; quite grown-up in manner.

"I don't like you, Sir James, when you talk like that," she said. "And I don't think father does, either. Do you, father?"

She withdrew her hand from the baronet's grasp and looked back at Roger Balfour as she asked the question.

"Emphatically, I do not," he replied. "But of course, my dear, you understand that Sir James is only jesting. We will excuse you, now. Good night and sweet dreams."

"The same to you, father, dear," she called back sweetly as she crossed the room to the door leading into the hall. Then, with another curtsey to Sir James she withdrew, taking care to close the door tightly behind her.

Sir James Hamlin and Roger Balfour were left alone together.

Alone?

Not quite. Not while those unseen, piercing eyes from behind the screen were focused upon Sir James like darts of living fire.

Not while two other pairs of eyes watched, and two silent forms lurked behind tattered

velvet portieres, tense, alert, expectant; waiting—waiting—while the little clock on the baronet's desk at Hamlin Hall told off the fleeting minutes of time:

Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick—

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

IN HYPNOSIS

"I TOLD YOU SO"

SIR JAMES HAMLIN was plainly annoyed by Roger Balfour's words and his firmness in sending Lucy from the room.

With every evidence of anger he walked over to where Balfour was sitting and drew up a chair facing him.

"Now, Roger," he said severely, his upper lip curling back and displaying his teeth as would a vicious animal, "I came over here tonight in a friendly spirit. I was going to suggest to you a way out of your financial difficulties. From your present attitude it would seem that you are not very much concerned for the welfare of your children. If you were, you would realize that you are treading on dangerous ground when you antagonize me."

Roger Balfour played thoughtfully with the pens in the tray on his desk. He was considering what to reply. Until this moment all had been easy. Lucy, with an almost uncanny accuracy, had remembered every detail of the conversation which had taken place on the oc-

casion of the baronet's memorable visit to her father, as long as she was in the room. She had been able to put the words on paper so that, until now, the Roger Balfour sitting there in her father's chair, could repeat each remark promptly and with suitable action.

What was said between her father and Sir James after her departure was unknown to her. No one on earth could have told the substance of that conversation but the baronet, himself. Now he was repeating, word for word, his share of that dialogue. Was there a man who could accurately guess what Roger Balfour had said in reply?

Any glaring error or discrepancy would be fatal to the plan of that clever, controlling brain, now concentrating all its energy upon the solution of this mystery. From behind the screen those blazing, steadfast eyes continued to hold the baronet in their power. He was re-living in every detail his experiences the night he last visited Roger Balfour.

The man in Roger's place must consider carefully the baronet's words, and choose his own accordingly. What, he asked himself, would Roger Balfour have said under the same circumstances? Would Roger's spirit guide his reply? At last, he spoke:

"I do realize it, Sir James. It is for that reason I sent my daughter from the room."

He continued to play thoughtfully with the pen-holder in his hand.

Sir James glared. "If you think, by such

actions, you can circumvent me, Roger, it is time you learned to the contrary. I know more about your finances than you think."

"I beg leave to differ with you there, Sir James. I am fully aware of the extent of your knowledge."

It was a shot in the dark, but it hit the mark.

The baronet sprang to his feet. "What is it you know?" he asked. The words were almost a hiss.

Quick thinking was now necessary. Of what could the baronet be guilty that would make him think he knew more about Balfour's affairs than did Balfour, himself? How could he have acquired such knowledge except by fraud or trickery? He had spoken of finances. Had there been a dishonest accounting, a falsifying of statements? It would seem the most probable. At all events a chance must be taken. And again the reply rang true.

"I know what you have done. I know that you have stolen from me right and left—impoverished me, thinking I would come to you for help. You want a mortgage on this property when—"

The baronet interrupted.

"I told you before, that I would lend you money on a mortgage and you refused. You said you would not accept it as long as you had a penny left. Well, now, you haven't a penny left. You can't live—you can't educate Lucy—and the boy—without money. I am interested in Lucy. I will educate her—I will edu-

cate them both—but I must have security. I must have a mortgage or—" he paused.

"Or what? Name it, you—"

"Lucy."

The eyes of Sir James glared as he pronounced the child's name. The eyes of the cloaked and hatted man behind the screen fairly transfixed him with their magnetic fire.

The man in the chair of Roger Balfour was a father. He had daughters of his own, as he had told Lucy but a short time before. He knew what a father would say to a man like Sir James Hamlin. No need to conjure the spirit of Roger Balfour to help him decide a matter of that kind. He sprang to his feet, almost overturning his chair in the suddenness of the move.

"You damned villain!" he cried. "If you dare—"

The baronet raised his hand protestingly.

"Don't get excited, Roger," he said, with an affectation of calm calculated to goad his victim to madness. "I am not quite so black as you think. I am only demanding your daughter's hand in marriage."

"That little girl? My God, man! Are you insane or a fiend incarnate?"

"I am no more insane than you are, Roger. I am thinking only of Lucy. I have loved her and coveted her since babyhood. You have always distrusted me and suspected me of dishonesty. Twice you have called me a drug-user and a sensualist. But you couldn't prove it

then, and you can't prove it now. You will never be able to prove it—"

Again he paused. Speaking in hypnosis, it was evident that he had been interrupted at this point.

The baronet's rapid utterance had made it difficult for the man he addressed to prepare a reply with any degree of thought. Again, he had to rely upon intuition. He had been looking at Sir James, steadily. He had marked the physical characteristics of his appearance. He had noted his manner when talking with Lucy, and he had made his conclusions accordingly.

If Roger Balfour had once told Sir James Hamlin that he was a drug-user and a sensualist, doubtless Roger Balfour had some reason for making those statements. If, as it would appear from the baronet's own words, Balfour had been struggling to extricate himself from the thralldom of Sir James' power, he would naturally have spared neither time nor effort in procuring the proofs, which before he had lacked, of the man's evil habits and character. It was reasonable to assume that, upon the occasion of this momentous conversation, Roger Balfour had such proofs; otherwise he would not have dared be so defiant.

That was the reasoning of Roger Balfour's "double" and he answered accordingly. His tone was measured and convincing.

"But it happens that this time I can prove it."

"You lie!"

Roger's double sighed with relief. He felt now on firmer ground. He knew that back of that screen was one who was thrilled and jubilant at this astounding demonstration of Sir James' duplicity. Seating himself again in his chair, he drew open the desk drawer a trifle and glanced within.

"Don't think everyone lies because you do it so much yourself," he said, coolly. "I have the proofs, right here in my desk."

Roger Balfour knew that he was dealing with a man who was both bad and desperate, but he did not know how bad, nor how desperate until he looked up from the desk drawer to find himself covered by the baronet's automatic.

Involuntarily he made a move to reach his own weapon. Sir James anticipated the move. With the quickness of a tiger he sprang and, still keeping Balfour covered with his automatic, snatched the latter's revolver from him before his fingers had fully grasped it.

"Sit down," ordered Sir James.

Balfour obeyed.

"Now hand over those papers."

Quick thinking again on the part of the man threatened. Did Roger Balfour hand over those papers? If he did, he would undoubtedly be alive at the present time. Therefore, he must have refused.

"Never!" declared his counterpart. "If you think you can threaten and terrorize me into

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. *London After Midnight.*

THE BAT GIRL LEANS MENACINGLY OVER THE SHOULDERS OF LUCY BALFOUR.

giving up anything that will protect my daughter from your machinations you have deceived yourself."

The baronet came closer. His face became crafty, vengeful, merciless. He hated Roger Balfour with the instinctive hatred that an evil person has for one who is all he knows he, himself, ought to be and is not.

"Quick! The papers," he demanded. "I'm in no mood for parleying. Give them to me or, by heaven, I'll—"

"I'll see you in hell first!"

Roger Balfour's double blurted out the words without thought. Like lightning came the reply.

"Damn you! You'll go first." The automatic in Sir James' right hand barked once.

Roger Balfour's double had been well coached. He crumpled in a heap and slid to the floor.

When the baronet reached his side, a thin red stream was trickling from his temple. For a few seconds Sir James stood there, looking down upon the man who, for years, he had feared; the one person living who knew him for what he was. Then he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and carefully wiped the revolver. This done, he placed it just beyond the outstretched fingers of the man on the floor.

The effect was satisfactory. "Plainly a suicide," he muttered. "Ought to have been done long ago."

With the handkerchief still over his hand he

pulled the desk drawer fully open and inspected its contents. Several envelopes fastened togethed with a rubber band were marked important. He glanced at them with annoyance, then thrust them back in the drawer. Other papers were there. None of them was what he wanted. Finally he slammed shut the drawer.

"Damned liar!" he muttered. "What a stupid ass I was to believe him. He didn't have a thing."

Suddenly he listened. To those watching eyes behind the tattered curtains, to those other eyes—those fixed upon him with such fervid concentration—it was evident that he was thinking now solely of escape without detection.

He glanced about furtively. Listened again. Made certain that the handkerchief and his own revolver were back in his pocket. Then he was prompted to turn around and face that crumpled heap on the floor. It would not be safe to turn his back to it. Retribution might overtake him before he could get outside the house. Very cautiously he stepped backward, toward the door by which he had entered. One step—two steps—three steps—He was almost across the room, now.

Five steps—six steps—seven! His right arm was extended toward the door knob. But the doorknob was no longer there. At least, his fingers did not come into contact with it, for his arm was caught in a powerful grip and held fast by some unseen force reaching forth from

behind the side drapery. Simultaneously a similar force was exerted upon his left arm. He struggled with sudden frenzy, his eyes wide open and staring.

"I told you so," called a voice. "I knew he'd be violent. He's still in hypnosis. Hold him. Don't let him get away. He's dangerous. Hold him tight. I'm coming!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

A DRAMATIC AWAKENING

"HAVE I BEEN ASLEEP?"

A MAN rushed forth from behind the swaying, tottering screen. He was bent and crooked of form and wore an enveloping cloak and a beaver hat. His eyes were brilliant points of light. He concentrated their power upon the central one of those three writhing figures before the door.

Both of the others were husky, muscular men, but their strength was taxed by the wiry, agile, elusive little man who struggled in vain to wrest his arms from the grip of their heavy hands. He did not speak. His face was stamped with terror. But his eyes were those of a somnambulist—round, wide-open, staring glassily.

The man was Sir James Hamlin.

Of a sudden, he ceased to struggle. He became passive; stood upright between them; straight, slender, rigid as a statue, staring straight before him—into the subduing, controlling orbs of the bent, cloaked figure in the beaver hat.

That figure approached closer; passed a hand rapidly before the baronet's face and addressed him in a low tone.

A shudder passed over Sir James. His eyes assumed their normal expression and he glanced about in surprise.

Balfour House! This room! How had he come here? This caricature of a man standing before him? He had seen him from the window, that night he and Colonel Yates had peered into the haunted, secret room. These other two men on either side? Why were they gripping his arms so tightly? Who were they? What did it all mean?

But there was something strangely familiar about this scene! Involuntarily his gaze wandered to he spot where he had last seen Roger Balfour.

Good God! How could this be? Roger—dead—there on the floor, right where he had fallen—the revolver just beyond his outstretched hand!

Was it a dream, then, that he, Sir James Hamlin, had made his escape in safety? A dream that years had passed? A dream that Lucy had been his ward and that he was preparing to marry her?

It must be—it must be! There was nothing else to believe. All that he had thought true during the supposed passage of years had been but an hallucination, the fleeting chimera of those brief moments he had taken to cross the floor after shooting down the man who had

threatened to expose him—Sir James Hamlin —as a criminal, unfit for association!

These men! Roger must have had them in waiting—in hiding—ready to take him into custody. That was it, surely. And he had turned the tables upon Roger. He had shot him before he had spoken. He was glad of it —glad!

He threw back his head and laughed. It was a mirthless laugh, empty, cackling, horrible.

What illusions he had had—all in those few minutes! Why, he had actually dreamed that Roger's coffin was empty, after he had seen him laid away in it! And he had believed that Roger and other dead and gone Balfours were prowling around as vampires, preying upon him—and preparing to take Lucy from him! More than that—he thought she had gone— and that he had sent to Scotland Yard for help!

Now to awake and find that these things were but fleeting visions which had passed through his mind in an interval of mere seconds—the first few seconds after he had killed his nemesis—made him wonder, almost, if the very present was real.

He doubted it. But there certainly were men clinging to his arms! And this weird, half skeleton, half gnome-like creature that stared at him he had seen before—but where? In his dream visions? If not, then the creature was real and not an illusion. And if he were not an illusion, then none of the rest were illusions.

He was tangled, perplexed—hopelessly con-

fused. Had he been ill? Was this the phantasmagoria of some strange sleep or fever?

Ah, no. He knew better than that. This was reality. These men holding him were no figments of the imagination. That form on the floor, with the life blood slowly ebbing from the bullet wound in the temple—the wound that he had made when he shot Roger—that was real. He had killed Roger, just as he had so often thought of doing.

But he had not made his escape. Roger had been too clever for him. He had had his men in hiding—but he had not been clever enough to save his own life!

But now, what about himself? What were these men going to do to him? Drag him off to jail—to court—to execution? In a flash he saw himself as a prisoner in the dock, receiving sentence. He saw the crowds looking on. The preparations for his death. He saw Lucy—that sweet little girl, the one real ennobling love of his life—in tears and loneliness because there was no one now to look after her. She would be penniless. He—who had thought to provide for her—had robbed her father of everything. And now, upon his death—his execution—his wealth would go to his next of kin. Lucy would be a beggar.

There was no hope—no hope for himself except by the mercy of these men—his captors. Roger had hired them. Perhaps he could sway them by an offer of money—a plea for mercy. He did not want to die—he was afraid to die.

Convulsive tremors began to shake his frame. His face twitched, his hands shook. It seemed hours that he had been standing there. In reality it was but a few moments. But in that brief interval he had become terror-stricken, abject, cringing.

The man in the cloak and beaver hat was speaking to him. Sir James hardly sensed the words he uttered.

"Come. Snap out of it, you rascal. Come to life. It will not be for long, so make the most of it."

"Have—have I been asleep?" The foolish words faltered from the trembling lips of the cowed criminal. His voice sounded strange and far away. It was as if someone other than himself were speaking.

"No. You have not been asleep," snapped the cloaked man who loomed before his affrighted eyes like a judge. "You have been damned wide awake—and so have I."

He reached forward as he spoke and stripped back the sleeve from the wretched creature's left arm.

A cry of pain and rage escaped the murderer. He squirmed helplessly between his captors.

"Ow! Take care. Let me alone, you. That arm's sore. I—I hurt it."

"You're right you hurt it," returned the other. "I knew I clipped you when I shot at you last night. You miserable scoundrel! Sneaking around through your own house at night with a poisoned needle in your hand!

Thought you'd get Hibbs, didn't you? Well it was a jolly good thing for Hibbs that I was there in his place."

"You—you—" gasped the now thoroughly subjugated man. "Who are you? Who—"

The two who supported him felt him slipping downward to the floor. They jerked him upward but it was of no use. The limit of his endurance had been reached. He slumped forward in a dead faint.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SURPRISING REVELATIONS

"BURKE, OF SCOTLAND YARD!"

ROGER BALFOUR'S double rose from the floor and wiped the streaks of liquid rouge from his face. Then he picked up the revolver—the revolver so carefully placed by Sir James Hamlin—and tossed it onto the desk. A satirical smile curled the corners of his lips under the close-clipped mustache.

"Quite a demonstration of marksmanship," he observed, drily. "It was a good thing for me that the Chief had both those revolvers doctored."

He crossed to where the other men were occupied with Sir James. The fainting fit had been of short duration. He was sitting up now, in the chair where he had been placed while unconscious, and one of the men was giving him a drink. It seemed to steady him. For the first time he was able to comprehend his surroundings with normal intelligence. He stared at the man with the beaver hat. The latter had ceased to appear old and bent.

"Who are you?" asked Sir James, with some

semblance of his natural tone of authority.

"Who do you suppose?" was the reply.

The man removed his beaver hat, and tossed it to one of the men standing close to the chair in which the baronet sat. Then he flung off his cloak. Turning, slightly, he contrived by one dexterous movement to free himself of all other disfiguring accessories which had contributed to his uncanny and startling appearance.

When the baronet looked into his face again he beheld only his guest, the efficient and authoritative man he had welcomed to Hamlin Hall as "Colonel Yates, of India."

The baronet's cold blue eyes narrowed, quizzically. He looked a little like a weasel as he sat there, cowering in the chair, peering at the big man before him, striving to ferret out mentally some of the puzzling events of the several preceding days and nights. Finally he spoke:

"If I had not been disturbed by other matters I would have mistrusted you before. You are an impostor. Some kind of magician. Your lack of resemblance to my old acquaintance by the name of Yates puzzled me from the first. I thought, perhaps, the years had wrought the change. Now, I know you are no more Yates than I am. You are a fraud—a black-mailer. You have tricked me and made a fool of me. You have staged this affair here in Balfour House to entrap me. To hypnotize me and make me think and do things that would

later enable you to demand money from me. You'll suffer for it, you lying, thieving mountebank! You persuaded me to write to Scotland Yard only for effect. You intercepted the letter. You sent instead a parcel of thugs, to help you in your nefarious plans. You'll never get a penny from me—not a penny, do you understand?"

His voice had risen to a thin screech. None of his hearers made any attempt to stem the torrent of words. It seemed to be part of their plan to allow him to say all he wished. Now their silence annoyed him. It made him less certain; more apprehensive. His fingers began to work nervously. A look of fear crept into his eyes.

"Well, what have you to say?" he demanded, angrily.

"When you have quite finished, I may say quite a little," returned the man he had known as "Colonel Yates."

The latter removed his pince-nez. He did something to his hair, he changed the lines on his face. Then he threw back the lapel of his coat and revealed a badge. And, finally, he handed to the cowering criminal a neat little card, with lettering sufficiently clear to be easily read without the aid of a glass. Sir James, at least, had no difficulty in deciphering it, for after his one comprehensive glance, it fell from his shaking fingers and he leaned dizzily back in his chair.

"Burke, of Scotland Yard!" he ejaculated.

"At your service," returned the officer sternly. "And now, Sir James Hamlin, I am going to give you an opportunity to make a full confession. You shot Roger Balfour and you killed his son, Harry, with a poisoned needle. Why?"

"I—I had to."

The baronet whined forth the words while he was hardly conscious of their utterance. He was white as chalk and trembling from head to foot. He kept moistening his thin lips with his tongue and his eyes were not still a moment. Whatever self control he had ever possessed had been stripped from him forever. He was a broken wreck of a man, fearful, cringing, overtaken in crime, now on his way to the gallows.

"Why?" persisted the chief detective inspector. "Why did you have to kill them?"

One of the men standing beside the criminal gave a quick pressure on his wounded arm.

Sir James cried out with pain. "Don't do that," he whined. "It isn't necessary. I'll tell. I'm not a fool. I would be, if I tried to fight you." This to Burke. "I know about your work. You never arrest your man till you have evidence enough to convict. But if you know so damned much, what is it you want me to tell?"

It was the childish, petulant cry of a trapped and cornered man. He was small, mean and petty. No trace left of the pompous little baronet, humored by some, disliked by others,

distrusted by many, who was often arrogant and always suavely philanthropic when it served his purpose to appear in that rôle. All that was past, now. His future home was to be the cell of a felon—until the grave claimed him!

Talk? Of course, he would talk. It was the only solace left. It would be a relief—a satisfaction—to unburden his mind.

And perhaps—if he talked freely—this detective Burke, that pursuer who never failed to get his man, might be persuaded to keep Lucy in ignorance of his guilt. Yes, he would talk—upon condition. He waited for Burke's reply.

"I want you, Sir James, to tell just how you manipulated the business affairs of Roger Balfour to get control of his income and the management of his property. I want a complete accounting of all the money of which you defrauded him. I want a statement agreeing to the immediate repayment, through your agents, to Lucy Balfour of every penny of the amount you thus acquired. I want you to tell in your own words what passed between you and Roger Balfour on that night you shot him, and what your conversation was with Harry Balfour, on the night you followed him to Balfour House and stabbed him with that same needle that you had aimed at my throat to-night, when I lay waiting for you in Hibbs' bed. I knew you were jealous of Hibbs. I expected you would try something like that. Now, if you are ready

to give me what I require, I'll call in the stenographer."

The baronet moistened his lips again. He shifted his position a trifle and made a movement as if to loosen his collar. When he spoke it was but a whisper:

"Call him in."

One of the men present summoned the stenographer from his post in the hall.

"You'll talk?"

"Yes, but—"

"But what?"

"Lucy—" The guilty man was gasping like a fish.

"Yes? What about Lucy?"

The detective's utterance was cold, clear-cut, crisp. It was totally impersonal, unsympathetic and purely business-like. Sir James had a feeling that so far as this man was concerned, Lucy might have been a mere piece of furniture. Still, he persisted.

"I—" He moistened his lips again. "I want her spared."

"Spared? Explain yourself."

"I don't want her told. Keep her in ignorance. Don't make her suffer any more. She suffered enough when—when—"

"Yes. Go on."

"When she lost her father—and her brother."

"Oh, I see. When you killed them, you mean?"

"Yes."

The detective's face expressed the disgust and loathing he felt for the creature in the chair whose Maker had meant him to be a man. He stood there, looking down upon the cowering heap, but he spoke to the stenographer.

"Did you get that?"

"All of it, sir."

"Very well, Hamlin. Talk ahead. Miss Balfour will be spared as much as possible. It is rather late for you to be thinking of sparing her suffering. But go on. We'll do the best we can."

"There isn't much to tell," muttered the assassin who had just confessed to the deliberate murder of two men. "I hated Roger Balfour. He was always suspicious of me. Always trying to get something against me. Without his knowledge, I acquired financial control of the firm handling his business. When he discovered it, I already had things pretty much in my hands. You know about the accounts. I'm satisfied to give the money back. Let Lucy have it all—and the interest, too. I'd rather she would have it than my next of kin. I'll have to go over the papers with you some other time. But I gave statements to Roger regularly. He was getting poorer and poorer. He was a scholar; not a mathematician. He did not know what was being done; but he was suspicious.

"Twice he accused me of certain things. I defied him to prove his statements. He never did prove them. The night I called to see

Roger, I had a proposition to make him. I planned to marry Lucy some day. I knew he would never consent. I reasoned that if I proved to him that she was a pauper, and that the only way of ensuring her education and future happiness was through my assistance, there was a chance he would look at the matter differently.

"I broached the subject. He became angry; said he had proof right there in his desk that I was—well, what he said I was. He also declared he would have me arrested for fraud.

"I could not have that, you know. I had to do something. I did what any other man in my position would have done. I threatened him. I covered him with my revolver and demanded the papers—the proof he talked of. He refused. He reached for his revolver. I prevented him. He still refused to give me the papers. He said he would see me in hell, first. And—"

"You told him that he would go there first, and you shot him, eh?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Because you shot him again to-night—in hypnosis. That is, you shot his double. You are a good subject, Hamlin. You missed your calling. You would have been a good medium. However, get on with your confession. How about Harry?" The chief detective inspector had no time to lose. "Give him another drink, Joe," he instructed one of the two men in charge of the prisoner.

The drink was given, and the voice of Sir James trailed on:

"With Harry it was a little different. Had he agreed to my suggestions, there would have been no trouble. I never cared much for the boy. He was too like his father—set and stubborn. He knew his father did not trust me. Perhaps Roger had talked to him. Harry was a little older than Lucy, you know.

"But she worshipped him. She had no other companion, so I put up with the boy's ill humors until they were both grown. My plan was to send him away after Lucy and I were married. I was then intending to restore the Balfour grounds, and have the old house arranged for exhibition purposes. Lucy would have been supplied with everything that wealth could give.

"Then that Smithson woman came to stay with Lucy. She seemed meddlesome. I did not like her. She was too free with advice. Lucy and Harry would listen to her, instead of to me. I was going to discharge her, but Lucy begged me to let her remain.

"About that time Harry and I had a talk. He refused to do what I advised. Said he was going to live at Balfour House and that Lucy must go there with him. I argued, but he was obdurate. All these years I had been under the impression that Roger lied when he said he had proof concerning me. There was nothing in his desk that night when I searched it.

"But when Harry talked about going back

there to live—and taking Lucy with him—I began to recall that last talk with Roger and to wonder if, perchance, there might not be a secret drawer which, in my haste, I had overlooked. If any such proof existed I certainly would not want it to fall into the hands of either Lucy or Harry.

"The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to search the place again—more thoroughly than ever before.

"One night, after I had dined out, I had almost reached home when the idea occurred to me to go on to Balfour House and examine that desk. I turned back, crossed the gardens by way of a short cut, and reached the house in a few minutes.

"I unlocked the door and came in. I was hardly within the hall when I thought I heard footsteps outside. The place was hardly safe; it had been deserted for years; prowlers might be about. I had not my revolver with me. Nothing but—you know. I had used that earlier in the evening, so it was empty.

"Feeling it in my pocket, I remembered some curios Roger had in a cabinet in the hall. They are still there; you can see them. But there was also a bottle. I knew about it. Something from India, or Africa, that Roger had procured for a college friend who was doing experimental work. That bottle contained a fluid in which certain natives dipped their arrows. It meant instant death. Roger had it carefully labeled. The cabinet was locked. I had a bunch

of keys in my pocket. One of them fitted. I felt about carefully—it was dark, you understand—until my hand touched the bottle. I put it in my pocket, relocked the cabinet, and then prepared my weapon.

"You know the rest. It was better, I reasoned, to meet an adversary outside the house than inside. I met Harry just outside the door. He asked what I was doing there. I asked the same question of him. He replied, that from something his father had once started to tell him, he believed there were important papers—documents—in the house, for which he proposed to search.

"My being there convinced him that his surmise was correct. It also convinced him that if there were any such papers they were then in my possession. He demanded that I give him whatever I had taken from the house. We had hard words. He obstructed my path. Refused to permit me to continue my way until I had surrendered to him that which I had taken, or had told him for what I had been in search.

"I was angry. I gave him that which I had taken. That is all. You know the rest. There was a storm. All trace of two persons having been at Balfour House that night was obliterated. I don't know how you discovered it."

The murderer ceased speaking and leaned back in his chair, exhausted. For a moment Burke stood in deep thought. Then he asked,

"Have you ever been back here to search for those papers?"

"No." The reply was barely audible.

"Never found them, eh?"

"No."

"Very good. If they are here, we will find them, now." He turned and addressed one of the men who, throughout the confession, had been standing beside Sir James.

"Joe, you may slip the bracelets on him, now. Then go over and search that desk for a secret drawer." He looked at the stenographer. "Got it all?" he asked.

"All," was the reply.

"Then go out in the hall, unlimber that portable typewriter and make your transcription as quickly as possible. And while you are doing that, I want to tell this beautiful specimen of humanity here, just how we ran him to earth."

CHAPTER THIRTY

RECAPITULATION

"A VERY SUCCESSFUL TEST"

CHIEF DETECTIVE INSPECTOR BURKE had the attention of his colleagues as well as that of Sir James Hamlin.

"I told the assistant commissioner," said he, "that I would bring him proof that my pet theory could be practiced successfully in the capture of certain criminals.

"My theory is that a guilty person in a proper nervous condition, if brought in a hypnotic state to the scene of his crime (and there permitted to proceed according to his own inclinations), will, if the people and environment are the same in appearance as on that occasion, actually repeat the crime.

"You men present here to-night are my witnesses that the working out of that theory was a success. You saw Sir James Hamlin commit his crime. You heard his conversation with the supposed Roger Balfour. The stenographer, out in the hall, heard and took down every word of that conversation.

"Since then, and before he was aware of

these facts, Sir James Hamlin has confessed the crime. You have heard his confession. It tallies with every word of that conversation with the supposed Roger Balfour. You are also witnesses of the fact that Sir James, when making this confession which the stenographer is now transcribing, was not aware that he had re-enacted his crime *in toto*.

"Now, Sir James,—you have proved yourself unworthy of that hereditary title, but I will address you by it for the present,—I will explain a few things to you.

"You did not know that any man from Scotland Yard was interested in these Balfour House mysteries. I admit, you did very well in diverting suspicion with respect to Roger. So far as appearances were concerned, it was a suicide. But Scotland Yard does not always feel satisfied with appearances. The official record was accepted and filed. But never, for one moment, have I believed that Roger Balfour was a suicide.

"You were the last person with him. I kept my own counsel and tried to watch you. But I was not detailed to give my time to you. I was busy on other matters. I had reports on you from time to time. I learned that you used a drug. I knew of certain other habits that were not to your credit. But the Balfour children were being well cared for and educated. So far, so good.

"But like Roger Balfour, I distrusted you. You never were a person to inspire confidence

in people of any discernment. When Harry Balfour came home from school and Lucy was old enough to go out socially, but was kept largely in retirement, I became more suspicious than ever. I regret now that I did not act quicker or use more drastic means. Had I done so, I might have saved that poor boy's life.

"I did, however, the best I could, under the then known circumstances. I had discovered, by long and persistent effort, that some form of juggling had been done with the Balfour business affairs. I feared that when young Harry grew old enough to look into them something might happen to him, as to his father.

"A woman had formerly been identified with our force. She had married and given up the work. Left a widow, she needed to supplement her slender income. I talked with her. Suggested that she take a position at Hamlin Hall as semi maid and companion to Miss Lucy. She would have a comfortable home, adequate salary and, by following instructions from me, might secure for me certain information. As this was a personal matter, because of my stubborn belief that Balfour died by your hand, I could not offer a salary to this woman. It was necessary that she become a member of your household staff for her remuneration.

"That woman was Anna Smithson.

"Through her I learned that you were an habitual drug addict. That you were easily influenced. That you purposed marrying Lucy

Balfour. That Harry did not trust you. That you had a conversation with him relative to his going to a distant country and that he refused to mortgage his property or sanction your matrimonial plans. That he purposed leaving your house and taking his sister with him.

"I was barely in receipt of this information when the alarm was sent out that Harry Balfour was found murdered in front of the great door leading into Balfour House. I had a man checking up on that within fifteen minutes after the body was carried inside your door. My man was there before any other officer reached the scene. He discovered that someone had entered the house that night. That a key had been used, and no forced ingress effected. That the little curio cabinet had been tampered with. That a small, flat-bottomed object had been removed. The dust revealed it clearly enough. That finger and thumb prints were plentiful. We have them. We will compare them with yours later. Anna Smithson saw you going toward Balfour House on the night of Harry's death—

"The fact that you dined out that night furnished you a good alibi. I wanted you for the other crime, so we kept quiet. You begged haste in settling the affair. We permitted it to be settled. What Scotland Yard knew was never known by the local officer who handled the case.

"But Anna Smithson was still in your household. Anna Smithson discovered that small

round bottle, so plainly labeled for what it was —one of the most deadly poisons in the world —and emptied it. The contents are in my possession. She refilled it with a harmless fluid. If you had succeeded in injecting it into my neck last night when you tried to kill Hibbs it would have been uncomfortable, but not necessarily injurious.

"Knowing all this I determined to hypnotize you and see for myself—and other competent witnesses—just how you murdered Roger Balfour. So I rented Balfour House. I surrounded you with people—specialists, each,—to disturb your calm, shatter your nerves, and focus your mind upon Balfour House to such an extent that you would be readily subjective to my influence. It was unfortunate that your secretary could not have been taken into our confidence. He alone seems to have suffered any ill effects from the experiment. I understand that he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown from over-study before coming to you. The excitement of the last few days has proved too much for him. But I have seen him. He is rational again. The fever has subsided and within a few days he will be quite recovered.

"I put him to sleep by hypnotism last night because I knew you were a dangerous man. I knew by your face, when you saw the two young people together in the garden, that you were jealous of Hibbs. I did not want him to disappear as did young Balfour, so I gave you a

suggestion and then I waited in Hibbs' bed for you to appear. You came, all right, and you were not in hypnosis, either. But young Hibbs is even now in total ignorance of the whole affair.

"That day I took Lucy into my confidence. I told her only what was necessary. I asked her assistance in capturing the man who murdered both her brother and her father. She was glad to give her assistance. I pledged her to secrecy. But she does not, even now, know my identity, nor does she know that you are the man."

Sir James broke down and sobbed aloud.

"But the coffin—the empty coffin—the bat woman—" he gibbered, incoherently.

The detective's voice went on mercilessly.

"That was not Roger Balfour's coffin you saw, but its duplicate. The only way to get a confession out of you was to break your nerve. I guess we've done it. All in all, I consider that my theory on hypnotism has had a very successful test."

The man who had been searching the desk came over and handed Burke a packet of papers.

"I guess that's what you wanted, isn't it, Chief?" he asked.

Burke looked at the packet, read the outer inscription, then untied the tape that held the documents together and withdrew several papers from the upper envelope. He unfolded them, one at a time, scanned each rapidly, then

refolded them, replaced them in the envelope, retied the packet and put it in his pocket.

"Just what I wanted," he said.

The handcuffed man in the chair rocked himself from side to side and cried like a child.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

PROFESSIONAL PRIDE

"HE'S A HYPNOTIST—BUT I'M LUNETTE!"

LUCY BALFOUR was sitting beside Jerry Hibbs, putting ice on his head when the chief detective inspector entered the room.

She sprang up hastily and stared at him in perplexity. She did not think she had ever seen him before. Then, noticing the twinkle in his eyes, she exclaimed,

"Why, Colonel Yates! What have you done to yourself? A few minutes ago when I saw you, you were the old man in the beaver hat. Now you are somebody else. Who are you, anyway? I've been trying to enlighten Jerry as much as I can—but I know so very little. Won't you please tell us."

The officer drew up a chair and sat down beside them. "Yes, Lucy, I will," he said. "I have considerable to tell you. I am not sure that I shall tell it all at one time, either. This much you must know at once. That you, by your faithfulness in keeping your promise and carrying out my instructions with such wonderful accuracy, have enabled me, after five

years, to entrap and capture the man who killed your father."

"You have him?"

Both Lucy and Hibbs cried out in amazement.

"I have him. He has made a full confession. It has been signed before a notary and he is at this moment being taken to prison, handcuffed to two officers. He was not permitted to return to his home to put his affairs in shape. Mr. Hibbs will have to attend to that."

Lucy's face paled. A low cry of horror escaped her. "Oh, Colonel Yates!" she exclaimed. "Don't tell me—don't tell me it is —anyone I know."

"I will not tell you anything you do not wish to be told," was the reply."

The girl's heart sank within her. She had hoped against hope. But there was one thing she must know.

"Was it—the same one—both times?"

Burke nodded slowly. His eyes were filled with tears. "The same," he said. "Just as I suspected. Just as I told you that day in the rose garden. Would to God that I had acted sooner." Then he put his arm about her and let her weep against his shoulder. Over her head he signaled Hibbs to keep quiet until the paroxysm of grief had passed.

"You will not want to hear the confession?" Burke said, after Lucy had quieted somewhat. She shook her head in violent protest.

"No, no. I don't want to hear anything," she sobbed. "It is all too horrible. I only want to forget. Tell me anything—anything to make me forget, if only for a moment."

"Tell her how much you love her, Hibbs, that ought to comfort her," said the detective, forcing a smile upon his grim visage. "And I will tell her who I am."

Lucy sat erect and dabbled at her eyes with her handkerchief, while Hibbs imprisoned her other hand within his own. "Yes!" she exclaimed. "That is something I do really want to know."

Then Burke told her who he was.

"And the old man!" she cried. "That terrible-looking old man! Who was he and why did you change into his cloak and hat?"

"Because I did not wish to be immediately recognized as Colonel Yates."

"But who was it rented Balfour House?" asked Hibbs, to whom a great deal was still an unfathomed mystery.

"I rented Balfour House," returned Burke.

"But the others—all the uncanny things," persisted Hibbs, who had taken the ice pack from his head and was sitting bolt upright, eager for information. "I don't think I've had fair treatment in this matter. There are a good many things I want explained. Why was I made such a dupe?"

"To save you for Miss Lucy Balfour," Burke replied. "Your life would not have been safe a minute if you had not been in com-

plete ignorance of what was going on. You are a very capable young man, Mr. Hibbs, but not a good actor. You cannot dissemble. Being un-informed you were able to be of inestimable assistance by your encouragement of—my subject—in the study of witchcraft and occult manifestations. In your way you served a most excellent purpose. You made only one mistake. You did not go to bed and to sleep when I advised you to do so. Had you acted upon that advice, you would not be lying here with an ice pack on your head."

Hibbs grinned, sheepishly. "I'm sorry," he said.

"The others are all packing," said Burke. "Don't you and Lucy want to go down and see them before they go?"

Chief Detective Inspector Burke's attempt at diversion as a means of consolation had been momentarily successful. The natural curiosity of two young people who had been made participants in such an elaborate performance of histrionic talent, detective work, hypnotism and legerdemain was more than sufficient to send both Lucy and Hibbs hurrying off with him to learn more details.

In the hall they met Smithson. She looked into Burke's face and laughed.

"Oh, Chief," she exclaimed, "that was a terrible tarrididdle you made me tell about the old man melting into vapor and coming through the key-hole! And now I've had to

run away and let poor Billings believe I am a confirmed hard drinker. I think, after this, you will have to get me back in my old place."

"It's all arranged," Burke replied. "You are going to Liverpool to-morrow on another case, and your salary is assured."

Lucy cried out in dismay. Until then she had no idea that Smithson had left Hamlin Hall. She could not get along without Smithson, she declared.

"I think you will be able to, my dear," whispered Hibbs. "We will be married to-morrow in my father's old church and go on a wedding trip."

Before Lucy could hide her blushes or whisper a reply, there descended the stairs from the secret, haunted chamber a man and a woman in animated conversation. The man carried a roll of loosely looped wires over his arm.

The woman was piquant and attractive. She was neatly dressed for traveling and she was folding a long, trailing black garment as she walked, preparatory to placing it in a small satchel that stood open on a window ledge in the hall.

"Now look wot I've bin an' done," exclaimed the man. "While I was listenin' to you tellin' me wot to do, I went an' lef' my cap up in the ghost room."

The woman laughed. "You'll 'ave to go back an' find it, Jimmy," she said, and her

voice sounded strangely familiar to Lucy. "You'll need it at the music 'all."

"The bat woman!" exclaimed Lucy, suddenly recognizing the speaker. "Why, isn't she pretty? How did she ever do it?"

The woman, unconscious of their proximity, continued packing away her wardrobe.

"Well, when I gets my next engygement," called back the man, as he trudged back up the stairway, "I 'opes there'll be no spookin' into gryve-yards, nor roostin' in clock towers with bats and screechin' syreens."

"And he was the butler," Lucy added. She turned to Burke for enlightenment. He called to the attractive young woman and she joined them at once.

"Miss Balfour and Mr. Hibbs are interested in your accomplishments, Luney," he told her. "They want to know how you transform yourself into a bat on the ceiling and perform other marvellous feats by the aid of those wires I just saw Mooney bringing down the stairs."

The young woman laughed. "They should read the paipers," she replied. "I thought everyone knew about Mooney and Luney, the music 'all 'ead liners."

"Oh, we will surely come to see you perform some day, won't we, Jerry?" said Lucy.

"That we will," declared Hibbs. "Chief Inspector Burke seems to have put on a jolly good show, here. I'm sorry I missed it."

There was mischief in the young woman's eyes as she shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, his show wasn't so much," she said. "He's only a hypnotist, you know, but I—I am Lunette, the bat. 'I fly by night, an' I sleep by day, the looniest kind of a bat!' "

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